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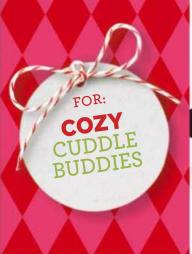
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AKATIKO OGAWA

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MY YEAR-END MESSAGE TO YOU

hat will you remember most about 2015? For me, it will be marked as the year that we listened to you and heard your suggestion to make bold moves. Our February 2015 Black Lives Matter cover, the first in our 45-year history not to feature a model or celeb; the launch of our BeautyBox, specially curated by and for Black women; and the announcement that we will be expanding the Essence Festival to Durban, South Africa, in 2016 and 2017 are evidence that we want to provide a platform for solutions and experiences that will move us all onward. I am humbled by how much our brand means to so many. It serves as a daily reminder to me, and to our entire team, that we must continue to raise the bar.

Looking back at this year, we saw how much you enjoyed sharing via social media our stunning photo of the talented Black women who keep the Obama administration humming, watching controversial "Stand Your Ground" persona Marissa Alexander return home to her family, and embracing a TV character named Cookie as one of your favorite quilty pleasures.

Looking forward to 2016, we plan to further inspire and excite you to create a life of infinite possibilities.

On a personal note, I've been blessed to travel the country and to get to meet many of you face-to-face.

Looking forward to 2016, we plan to further inspire and excite you to create a life of infinite possibilities."

caring about this brand so deeply and for letting us know how much you appreciate what we do. The passion we feel for you, our ESSENCE family, gets richer year by year. It is our continued desire to celebrate the power and beauty that we see in you and to share that with the world.

Thank you for

Wishing you and all of those you cherish a blessed holiday season and

a peaceful and graceful entry into the new year.

Stay in touch,

Varessa K. De Luca

VANESSA K. DE LUCA

Editor-in-Chief

Twitter: @Vanessa_KDeLuca Instagram: vanmommy E-mail: Vanessa@essence.com

OUR GIFT TO YOU!

In the spirit of giving, we wanted to share with you an exciting new way to keep up with us wherever you are, wherever you go. Thanks to Texture, a Web site and app that lets you download all your favorite magazines, we can offer you the gift of ESSENCE. This month, ESSENCE readers are invited

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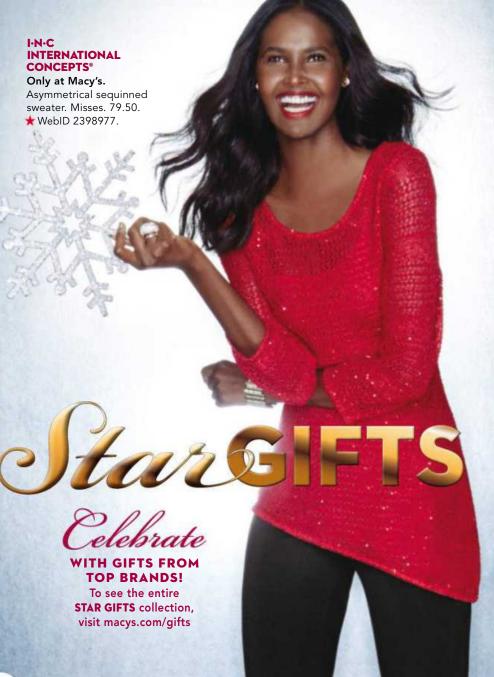








TOMMY HILFIGER BOLD



STAR GIFT BETSEY JOHNSON

Cubic Zirconia heart necklace. \$25. ★ WebID 2366395. Gold-tone bow-hinged bangle. \$35.

★ 2366392. 3-pair stud set. \$25.





fur throw. Polyester. \$160 ea. * WebID

2445432. Gifts also available.





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Lotion and a 0.25 oz. Deluxe Mini Parfum.

★ WebID 2388383.



STAR GIFT TOMMY HILFIGER Active vest with nylon tote bag.

Active vest with nylon tote bag. Misses. 89.50. ★ WebID 2371039.



STAR GIFT LACOSTE Men's cotton classic pique polo. 89.50. ★ WebID 2325159.



STAR GIFT VINCE CAMUTO Jemma leather satchel. \$248. **★** WebID 2453147.



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HERE'S THE MUSIC ON STAFFERS' PLAYLISTS AS THEY CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAY SEASON

"Do You Hear What I Hear?"

-Destiny's Child

'What Christmas

Means to Me

-Stevie Wonder

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—Jackson 5

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-Boyz II Men feat.

Brian McKnight

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—Beres Hammond

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"Starting Today



'Last Christmas' -Wham!

"This Christmas"

-Donny Hathaway



"All I Want for Christmas Is You' -Mariah Carey



'Do You Hear What I Hear?







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Wrapping -The Waitresses

WE ASKED YOU, YOU ANSWERED!

FROM GIFT GIVING AND RECEIVING TO HANGING ORNAMENTS TO SPENDING TIME WITH LOVED ONES, ESSENCE INSIDERS TELL US HOW THEY REVEL IN THIS MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR

THIS SEASON'S CELEBRATIONS

Of all the major holidays, Christmas topped the list of the special occasions we observe



NEW YEAR'S EVE



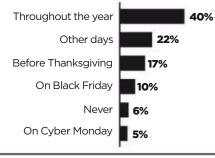
CHRISTMAS



THANKSGIVING



SHOPPING ALL THE WAY When playing Santa, you picked up presents at various moments



YOUR HOLIDAY ESSENTIALS

For you, these elements were key to happy festivities

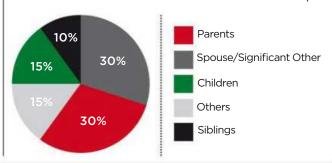


DECK-THE-HALLS MEMORIES

"Traveling in a packed car with my family singing The Temptations version of 'Silent Night' in four-part 'harmony.' I use quotes because Lawd knows dogs howled and eyes watered when we all went to 'sleep in heavenly peace.'" —Danita J. Reese, Philadelphia

THE PERFECT GIFT

ESSENCE Insiders found these folks the hardest to shop for



FAVORITE YULETIDE REMEMBRANCES

"When it was time to leave the hospital on December 21 after the birth of my son, the nurses put him in a big Christmas stocking and gave him to me. Best gift ever!"

> —Sharalyn D. Shelton, Hope Mills, NC

"EVERY YEAR MY BEST FRIEND AND I SET ASIDE THE FIRST SATURDAY IN DECEMBER TO SHOP. WE OPEN AND CLOSE THE MALL AND ONLY STOP FOR LUNCH. IT'S SO MUCH FUN! WE BOTH LOOK FORWARD TO IT AND LET NOTHING INTERFERE WITH OUR PLANS. WE'VE BEEN FRIENDS FOR MORE THAN 50 YEARS."

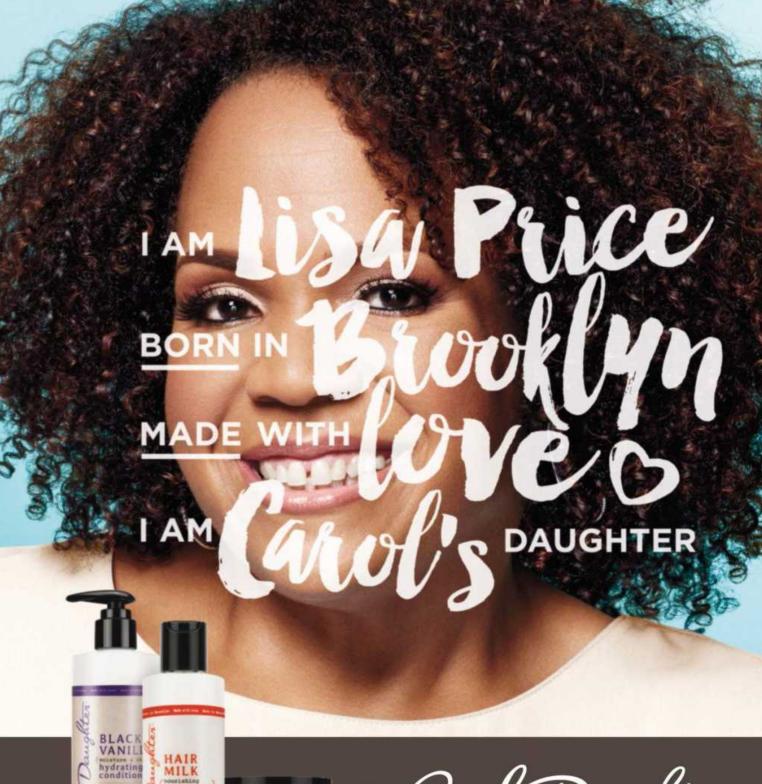
-Gloria Kelly, Decatur, GA "My family's first white Christmas in Colorado. My kids had never seen snow. We woke up to mounds of it. It felt like a holiday movie."

—Aganta Beasley Thomas, Houston

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Tell us what you think about this issue. E-mail us at letters@essence.com





available at CAROLSDAUGHTER.COM & SALLYBEAUTY

Carols Daughter

"More than 25 years ago, in my Brooklyn kitchen, I began creating beauty products made with natural ingredients and lots of love. I needed a name for my company, so I made a list of everything I was and everything I wanted to be, and I realized the most special thing I am is Lisa, Carol's Daughter."

-Lisa Price, Founder

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KITCHENAID

tilt-head stand mixer with glass bowl in toffee. 5-quart size,



EZ GLIDE

balancing scooter, \$600, ezglidenow.com.



JACOBS Decadence Eau de Parfum, \$95. Sephora.

MARC



MOVADO

"Edge" watch, \$995, movado .com.



GIFT THE **GOODS YOUR** LOVED ONES WILL CHERISH ALL YEAR LONG

> **PHOTOGRAPHY** BY GREG VORE

ALDO

"Morgano" clutch, \$60, aldoshoes.com.

2015 GIRIGUID

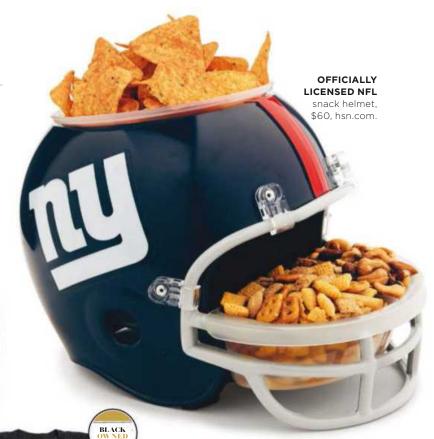
HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

THE MEN IN YOUR LIFE

...DESERVE ALL THAT KEEPS THEM SMILING



TARGET wing sauce gift set, \$13 for 6-pack, Target.



PAUL SMITH socks, \$30,

Paul Smith, NYC, 646-613-3060.



1

BEVEL 90-day starter kit, \$30 per month, getbevel .com.



HENNESSY X.O.

cognac, \$200, reservebar .com. ▷

COURTESY OF BRANDS (5)



Hade in

Made in.



BOSE SoundTouch 10

Wi-Fi and

Bluetooth speaker,

\$200, bose.com.



HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

THE LADIES

...DESIRE INSPIRATION, INNOVATION AND SOMETHING PRETTY



STELLÉ AUDIO mini-clutch speaker, \$149, stelleaudio.com. * > 3111 -+



FURLA "Bubble Pon Pon" key

ring, \$178, furla.com.





DAVID YURMAN "Aluminum Renaissance" bracelets, \$250

APPLE

rose gold watch, \$349.

apple.com.

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HOLIDAY HIT LIST

Nothing makes the season brighter than stepping out in the latest styles. So go ahead, make your holidays fashion-forward with DSW. Spend a Little. Give a Lot.





HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

HOSTS & HOSTESSES

...WILL OOH AND AH OVER THESE UNIQUE TREATS



MAGNIFIQUE foil-pressed art print by Marabou Design, \$34 (unframed), minted.com.



CARIBPOLITAN tea towel, \$20, iamcaribbeing.com.







WALK TALL

Equestrian-style boots are still trending, so add an over-the-knee edge to this elegant style to make it your own, perfect over leggings or with a chic mini-dress.

MADDEN GIRL PARKER, \$79.95 COMPARE AT \$100



SHINE ON

Every girls needs some December sparkle and these party-ready sequin stilettos deliver, they're made for an LBD or even distressed denim.

\$39.95 COMPARE AT \$65







90S REDUX

Chunky, lace-up boots reminiscent of grunge go glam with a stacked heel in burgundy leather, ideal with black tights and dresses or wide-leg pants. MIX NO. 6 ELISABET, \$59.95 COMPARE AT \$80



ALL THAT GLITTERS

Deck the halls for every festive fête in a totally decked out statement piece, it instantly glams up any look from a simple white tee to a full-length maxi.

ONE WINK NECKLACE, \$29.95 COMPARE AT \$60



BOOTIE BOOM

Put a twist on traditional ankle-booties with quilted and studded details in a pretty navy hue, slip them on with a pencil skirt or some fab flares. . ADDRIENNE VITTADINI PELLI, \$69.95 COMPARE AT \$129







ULTIMATE ACCENT

Gold and black is the IT combo this season and this beaded clutch brings the hot trend to any outfit, try it for a girls night out or even a day of shopping.

DEUX LUX, \$39.95



WINTER SPORTS

MID SUEDE WTR

Warm up to high-tops, the fur lining means you can keep your sporty style through the winter, pair with rolled jeans or a fit and flare dress.

NIKE PRIMO COURT



COWBOY UP

Country goes all out couture for a fun, flirty look designed to get you noticed, rock these boots with a full skirt or skinnies so they pop. NOT RATED TECHO.
\$74.95 COMPARE AT \$95





INTRODUCING 3 NEW MULTI-USE

WINNING the



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*25 winners will be notified by 1/15/2016. Each prize pack valued at \$50.

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WAY ON AVUNCSS.

CURL DEFINING GELÉE

with Sunflower, Marshmallow Root & Aloe

MOISTURE WITH Shine





Style Tip:

Apply to damp hair for "high-definition" curls without crunch.

Benefit: Defines 8 imparts shine to dry waves and curls.

CURL ENHANCING DUAL

with Sunflower & Marula Oil





HYDRATION MILK

WITHOUT Weight

Style Tip:

Apply to dry hair for a style and moisture refresher.

Benefit: Primes & moisturizes all curl types.

DEEP MOISTURE MASQUE

with Sunflower & Noni Fruit







Apply to clean, damp hair and cover with cap for intense moisture treatment.

Benefit: Softens & repairs stressed, brittle hair.





BRITTANY **HAMPTON**

E!'S FIRST HOUSE OF DVF WINNER SHARES HER STYLE SECRETS, ALONG WITH SOME SOUND ADVICE ON HOW TO SUCCEED IN THE FASHION BUSINESS

BY PAMELA EDWARDS CHRISTIANI

ESSENCE: Since your big win on the first season of House of DVF, how has your life changed the most?

BRITTANY HAMPTON: The traveling has been remarkable. I've visited France, England, Germany, Singapore and Thailand. The most gratifying part of the experience is knowing I made an impact on the young women I met in all those countries.

ESSENCE: Any advice for young women of color on how to break into the fashion industry?

B.H.: Let your guard down, embrace your color, culture and ideas, and let that be what carries you.

ESSENCE: What do you want for the next phase of your career?

B.H.: I'd like to continue to be a creative influencer through fashion. My goal is to have a brand I can call my own, with a ready-to-wear line for both women and men.

ESSENCE: Before DVF you were a stylist at Nickelodeon. What was that like?

B.H.: As the head stylist at Nick, I really got to challenge my artistic side. The talent across the board gave me great insight into understanding consumers. It was all about figuring out what the actors wanted and needed to be confident.

DIANE VON

FURSTENBERG

\$498, dvf.com

ESSENCE: Your personal style staples?

B.H.: My DVF Arabella jumpsuit, a leather jacket with cool detailing, low-heel boots and my Jimmy Choo Marlins. I also keep getting compliments for my DVF Secret Agent handbag. Add a cute fur pom-pom to it and it's the definition of me!

ESSENCE: What's in your makeup bag right now?

B.H.: Kiehl's tinted BB Cream, Victoria's Secret Beauty Rush flavored gloss, Anastasia Beverly Hills Brow Wiz Pencil and Oral-B Glide Floss. □



OF DVF INSET, GREG ENDRIES/COURTESY OF NBC



TACORI















SOFT)

PINK LIPS ARE FAR FROM BORING. LAYER TWO ROSY SHADES TO HELP PUMP UP PASTELS **HOW-TO**

Makeup ace Robert Sesnek opted for the simplicity of a pink lip for Grace Gealey. He applied Chanel Rouge Allure in Extatique, then Chanel Rouge Allure Velvet in L'Eclatante, which is a bit more vibrant. "On deeper skin tones, going warmer and brighter when doing nude or pink lips tends to look best," says Sesnek. And the finish matters, too: "A subtle gloss looks good on everybody." ▷

Chanel Rouge Allure Velvet Luminous Matte Lip Colour in L'Eclatante (\$36, chanel.com)



Oh what fun! Toast the season with an iconic red

Celebrate in beauty: This bestselling red liquid lipstick flatters every skintone and is sure to make a lasting impression.

SEPHORA COLLECTION Cream Lip Stain in Always Red \$14 Exclusive.

SEPHORA

SEPHORA.COM



SPICY

A FIERY RED LIP AND BROWN SMOKY EYE, INSTEAD OF CLASSIC BLACK, ARE A FRESH PARTY PAIR

HOW-TO

"It takes a woman who's fierce, secure and confident to pull off this look," says makeup whiz Renny Vasquez, who crafted it for Gabrielle Union. The focus is a vivid kisser. Vasquez lined the lips with a pencil, then filled them in with a liquid lipstick. "This red is perfect for most brown skin tones because it's really neutral—not too blue or orange" he says. ▷

MAC Cosmetics Lip Pencil in Cherry (\$17, maccosmetics. com)

Jeffree Star

Velour Liquid Lipstick in Redrum (\$18, jeffreestar cosmetics.com)





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Clarisonic Alpha Fit for Men (\$189, clarisonic.com)



Nest Fragrances Midnight Fleur Eau de Parfum (\$120, Sephora)



Victoria's Secret Bombshell Luxe Limited Edition Eau de Parfum (\$250. victoriassecret.com)



Dior Men's Sauvage Eau de Toilette (\$89, 3.4 oz, dior.com)



& Pierre Herme Travel Set (\$25, usa.loccitane .com for info)





Dr. Jart+ The Book of Masks (\$39 for 8-pack, sephora.com)



Baume de Rose Trio Deluxe (\$339, b-glowing.com for info)





Diptyque Limited Edition Liquidambar Candle (\$70, Nordstrom)



Smashbox Art. Love. Color. Master Class Palette for Eyes and Cheeks (\$65, Sephora)



2 The Art of Shaving Vetiver Soap on a Rope (\$25,



Kilian The Scented Tassel (\$185, Saks Fifth

Charlotte **Tilbury** Lipstick Wardrobe (\$305, Nordstrom) The Body Shop Modern Gent's Kistna Fragrance Kit (\$39, thebodyshop-usa.com for info) ▷



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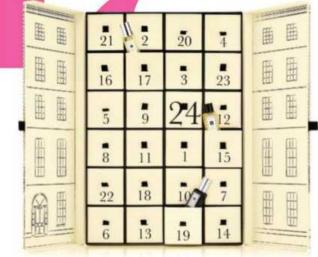
Lip Smacker Holiday Candy Collection in Pink (\$8, Target)

shuuemura-

usa.com)



Ren Moroccan Rose Experience Gift Set (\$80, spacenk.com)



Jo Malone London Advent Calendar (\$430, jomalone.com for info)



Tarte Stroke of

Tarte Stroke of Midnight Brush Set & Travel Case (\$44, Sephora)

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Lanvin Éclat d'Arpège Eyes on You Eau de Parfum, \$82, Nordstrom)





Ski-Liner Petites Highliner Collection (\$48, marcjacobs

beauty.com)

28
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Bottle Service 10-Piece Mini Nail Polish Set (\$37, sephora .com for info)







SK-II Limited Edition Facial Treatment Essence in Perseverance (\$229, sk-II.com)



Nars Steven Klein An Abnormal Female Lip Pencil Coffret (\$65, nars cosmetics.com)



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Dermatologist Recommended for Scars and Stretch Marks.

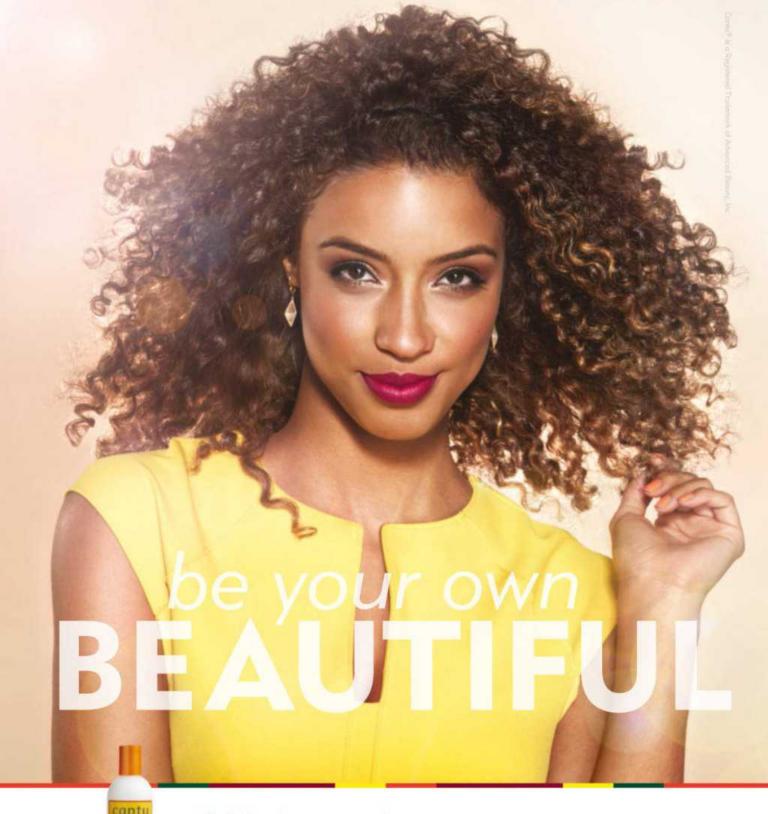


"I had a bad fall and ended up with a large cut along my shin bone. I like to wear skirts and dresses so I was worried about having a scar in such a noticeable place. Just as the wound was healing, I read an article in a magazine in which a celebrity swore by Bio-Oil. I was skeptical, but I thought it was worth a try. I faithfully followed the directions for using Bio-Oil, and my scar is now less noticeable. I feel confident wearing skirts and dresses again, and I have Bio-Oil to thank!" Gwen Streeter



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SCENE

Ten Podcasts Every Black Woman Should Hear

The term "podcasting" is ten years old, but lately the selection of voices of color has grown. Listen in on our new faves **BY PENNY WRENN**



ed pundits Aisha Danielle Moodie-Mills dissect "Poliwood" (the new D.C.).



3. The Dormtainment Podcast

Issa Rae is a big fan of this riotous group of guys who'll remind you of your college days.



4. Another **Round With** Heben and Tracy Get timely political discourse from these BuzzFeed editors.



to be a true hustler.



7. Friends Like Us Comedian Marina Franklin insightfully discusses Black hair and why women don't

have to ask for permission.

the top of their game.

8. Bevy Says Bravo's former Fashion Queens host Bevy Smith taps into her Rolodex to bring you people at

9. Black Girls Talking Dissect headlines, the so-called rules of feminism and the virtues of Drake with Alesia, Aurelia, Fatima and Ramou.



10. The Read Kid Fury and Crissle routinely "read" notable celebritiesexcept Beyoncé.













GOING THE DISTANCE FROM FRUITVALE STATION TO CREED, DIRECTOR RYAN COOGLER DELIVERS ANOTHER KNOCKOUT WITH THE LATEST INSTALLMENT IN THE ROCKY FRANCHISE



ESSENCE: What are your personal memories of the Rocky movies?

RYAN COOGLER: My dad and I would watch them when I was a kid. It became a bonding experience we shared before participating in sporting events.

ESSENCE: Michael B. Jordan starred in Fruitvale Station and now plays Apollo Creed's son, Adonis Johnson. What was it like collaborating with him again?

COOGLER: It was like going to work with a great friend and

teammate. Lots of filmmakers find themselves returning to a familiar formula, and I wanted to continue that success with Jordan.

ESSENCE: Creed is a departure from Fruitvale Station. What are the similarities?

COOGLER: Both are domestic dramas centering around young men and their relationships. They both speak to issues affecting many men of color, and I hope Creed [in theaters November 25] can speak to a wider audience of people as well. -Tyrus Townsend



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The Best **Books of 2015**

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COMMENTARY

In a troubling year marked by an increase in police brutality and random acts

of violence like the horrific shooting of The Charleston Nine, Ta-Nehisi Coates's

Between the World and Me

(Spiegel & Grau, \$24) is what we need to make sense of so much senselessness. Written as a letter to Coates's son, this volume packs more into each elegantly written sentence than books triple in length.

HISTORY ✓If you haven't read **Emmett Till: The Murder** That Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement (University Press of Mississippi, \$45), please do so now. The price of the book is steep, but look at Devery S. Anderson's remarkable account of this gruesome story as an investment. You may recall that between 2004 and 2005, the FBI delved back into the 1955 case and uncovered information that had been hidden by White officials who ruled the Jim Crow South.

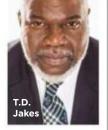
FICTION

At 84, Nobel laureate Toni Morrison is writing at the height of her considerable literary powers. In God Help the Child (Knopf, \$24.95), her first contemporary novel since 1981's Tar Baby (Plume), the author takes an open-eyed look into a disturbing issue: childhood abuse and neglect. All the Morrison magic is here-heartbreaking set pieces, her signature descriptive language, and unforgettable characters such as Bride, who is driven by childhood scars that take much time to heal.

INSPIRATION She's back! Iyanla Vanzant, that is. While we glean wisdom from her hit TV show, OWN's Iyanla: Fix My Life, I have been equally drawn to the motivational speaker's books. Trust: Mastering the Four Essential Trusts (Smiley, \$24.99) is Iyanla at her best. You don't just give away your trust to anyone, or so we've been told. Here the author demonstrates that one of the toughest battles we'll face is trusting ourselves to make smart decisions to live an amazing life.

LEADERSHIP

T.D. Jakes follows up *Instinct* (Faith-Words), his mammoth 2014 smash, with Destiny (FaithWords, \$25). It encourages us to tap into the GPS within to reach our greatest potential. Believing that, at our core, we can all achieve, Jakes gives us this powerful blueprint, which offers practical tools to help us get out of our own



way and stop sabotaging ourselves and start experiencing seasons of contentment, fulfillment and unbridled joy.

ROMANCE Who writes about amour better than New York Times best-selling author Brenda Jackson? Proof needed? Pick

up the un-put-downable A Lover's Vow (Mira, \$7.99).

Continuing the successful Granger family series, this juicy read focuses on handsome Dalton Granger. The business mogul always gets what he wants except for the just-asstunning private investigator Jules Bradford. Does she finally give in to our hero? Of course. Will you smile at the end? Of course. ▷



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BIOGRAPHY It's hard to believe that Florynce "Flo" Kennedy

(The University of North Carolina Press, \$30) is the first biogra-

phy of the pioneering activist. Sherie M. Randolph proves she is more than up to the challenge of bringing to life one of the most over-the-top and brilliant people in recent memory. Randolph moves beyond the bigness of Kennedy's personality.



DEBUT NOVEL The Turner House (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$23), Angela Flounov's inaugural effort, has critics, including this one, raving. Set against the backdrop of Detroit's economic collapse, it's an ac-

count of a family that feels like your own, and you follow them as they face moral and financial decisions you would hope you never have to make. This bold saga does more to shed light on the crisis in the Motor City than any documentary or news report.

CHILDREN'S LIT

Edwidge Danticat wrote two of the best books for young readers this year. I heartily recommended Untwine (Scholastic Press), for ages 12 and up. Mama's Nightingale (Dial, \$17.99), the author's second offering, is a tender story about immigration and its impact on families.

> Vividly illustrated by Leslie Straub, Danticat's tale for ages 5 through 8 charts the life of Saya, whose mother is sent to an immigration

detention center.

POLITICS

Since 1997, journalist April Ryan has covered the White House. In The Presidency in Black and White (Rowan & Littlefield, \$24.95), the American Urban Radio Networks staple takes us behind the scenes of the political epicenter of the world. Ryan offers a refreshing view of three presidents-Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obamaand adroitly looks at the surprising ways each leader handled or didn't handle complex issues.





Blake

His second chance at life made possible by an organ donor

Blake received his heart transplant when he was just two weeks old. Now, when his mother Robin watches Blake play soccer, she still marvels at the gift their family was given. You can be someone's second chance, too. Sign up as an organ, eye, and tissue donor.

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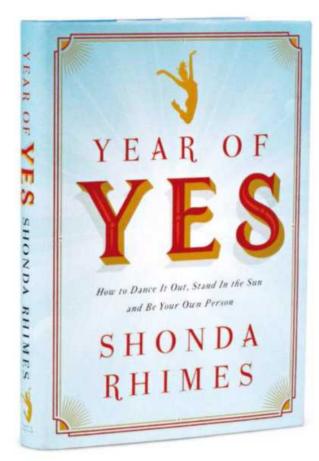
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Shonda's Rules

The most powerful woman in television stepped away from TV to pen **Year of Yes** (Simon & Schuster, \$24.99). Here are five things she discovered by saying Yes to nearly everything that once scared her

RULE #1: Always Say Yes to You

Before her Year of Yes challenge, Rhimes was in a serious relationship with a man who adored her and her curves. Loved ones pushed the idea of marriage on her, but she was never excited about the thought of being a Mrs. She was also stressed out and often turned to food as an escape: "I am the fattest I have ever been. He doesn't mind. He loves me. He's an incredible human being. The more incredible he is, the more food I shove in my face hole. Everyone is happy I am with him.... Like my street value went up because a guy wanted me. You

know what's a bigger taboo than being fat? Not wanting to get married."

RULE #2: Say Yes to Taking Care of Yourself

How did Rhimes drop 117 pounds? In the book she shoots down any notion that she went on a fad diet or had weight loss surgery. She turned to her physician and said, "I don't wanna be fat anymore. Help. Me." Next Rhimes looked to trainer Jeanette Jenkins. She also said Yes to drinking 64 ounces of water every day. No food was off-limits, but she maintained portion control and ate only what she craved.

RULE #3: Say Yes to All Play and No Work Weekends

While saying Yes, Rhimes became extremely busy and a social butterfly. But the mother of three found her children were missing her. "I work because I like working," she writes. "I am good at it, it works for me, it's my comfort zone. Knowing, facing the fact that I was more comfortable on a soundstage than on a swing set was incredibly difficult to handle. It's a difficult challenge for a hardworking, straight-A, obsessive perfectionist to leap into a lifestyle practice that requires everything to play." But play she did, and she lived by her maxim of work-free Saturdays and Sundays unless there was an emergency or one of her shows was filming.

RULE #4: Say Yes to Your Awesomeness

At a media awards luncheon where Rhimes was being honored with other influential women, she noticed a pattern: Each woman, when her accolades were cited, either did a Me? or a nod or a nervous giggle. In her Year of Yes project, Rhimes was no longer having that perspective. She says you should own your accomplishments and take compliments. She said Yes to accepting "any and all acknowledgments of personal fabulous awesomeness with a clear, calm thank-you and a confident smile and nothing more."

RULE #5: Say Yes to Saying No

On the set of Scandal, Rhimes is the ultimate gladiator. At home? Not so much. In one of the most poignant and potent sections of the book, Rhimes discusses when one must say No to a friend. In the anecdote, she states how people make assumptions about her wealth. Rarely has a prominent person publicly shared the ways in which financial success does less to change you and is more about the people you surround yourself with. For Rhimes, the No gene wasn't active in her early years of being one of Hollywood's top creative talents, whose signing bonuses made the news. One friend in particular treated Rhimes as if the executive producer was a bank with endless withdrawals. In her journey to Yes, Rhimes gained greater clarity, and in finding her voice she said No to her friend's request for money. Rhimes cautions that ending a friendship isn't easy and that the key is realizing whether the person was ever a friend from the start. -P.H.B.

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The only thing that separates women of color from anyone else is opportunity. You cannot win an Emmy for roles that are simply not there. So here's to all the writers...people who have redefined what it means to be beautiful. to be sexy, to be a leading woman, to be Black.

> -Viola Davis, accepting the Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series Award at the 67th annual Emmys

66 The dust always settles. And once the dust settles. it hasn't changed who you are. You're still the same. 99

> -Vanessa Williams to Robin Roberts, on returning to judge the Miss America pageant



"Oftentimes the work of Black women has gotten erased from the civil rights struggle. There were Black men who participated in

this action, but we thought that a Black woman would be a very strong symbol."

-Bree Newsome, on the decision for her to remove the Confederate flag from the grounds of the South Carolina statehouse

"If we want to honor the courage of those who marched that day, then all of us are called to possess their moral imagination. All of us will need to feel, as they did, the fierce urgency of now."

President Obama, at the 50th anniversary of the Selma march commemoration

"If you want to enjoy our culture and our lifestyle, bond with us, dance with us, have fun with us, twerk with us, rap with us, then you should also want to know what affects us, what is bothering us, what we feel is unfair to us. You shouldn't not want to know that."

-Nicki Minaj, on cultural appropriation, to The New York Times Magazine



66 I won four Grand Slams in a row and got to the semis in another one, and I've done that twice. I mean, how many people have done that? So yeah, it wasn't a loss for me; it was a win and a learning experience.

-Serena Williams, on her banner year despite losing at the U.S. Open



-Misty Copeland. to ESSENCE

We are glorious. We are majestic. We are gorgeous. And we are present.

> -Ava DuVernay, at ESSENCE's 8th annual Black Women in Hollywood luncheon



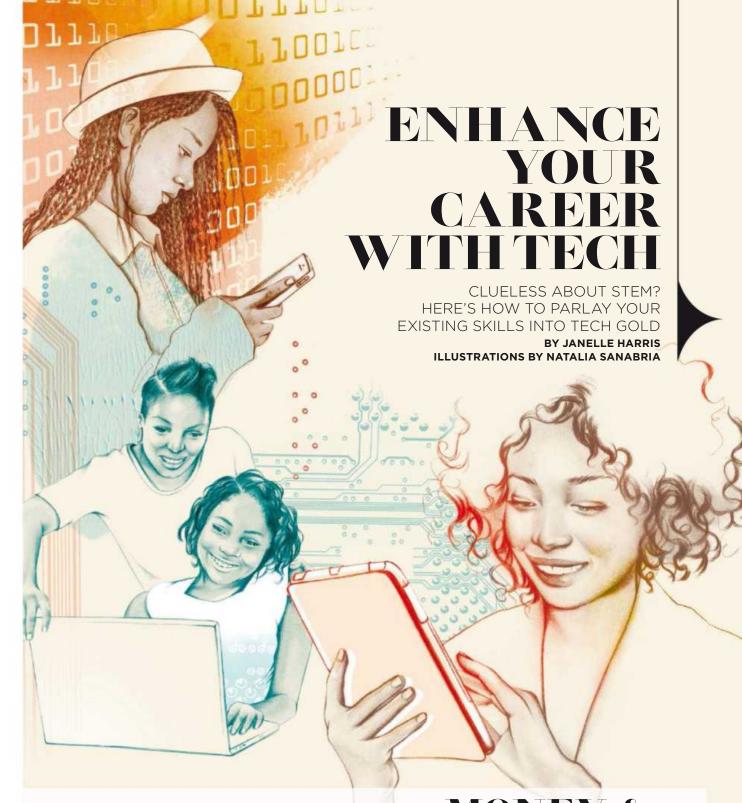
"Our demand is simple: Stop killing us

-Activist Johnetta Elzie,



to The New York Times Magazine





POWEY&

echnology is pervasive, insistent and, without a doubt, necessary. As reported by *U.S. News & World Report*, by 2020, there will be some 10 million STEM job openings. Even if you don't want to pursue a career in science, technology, engineering or math, you'll likely need to stay ahead of the STEM curve in your own industry. Here's our guide to exploring these fields at any stage in life and in any capacity.

TRANSFORMING INTO A MID-CAREER TECH MASTER

There's a myth born of Silicon Valley's invention-rich culture that innovation is the exclusive property of young people. But the hero in every success story isn't a twentysomething who created a million-dollar Web business right out of college. In fact, a recent study concluded that twice as many tech company founders are older than 50 than are younger than 25.

As the projected retirement age for Americans continues to rise, from 60 in 1995 to 66 in 2014, experienced Black women are setting new goals and ascending to greater professional accomplishment. Some are launching businesses, while others are pushing for corporate achievement, but for both groups, trepidation about technology is no longer an option, says 43-year-old Darlene Gillard, partner and partnership director at digitalundivided, a social enterprise committed to helping entrepreneurs of color build scalable and investable companies.

Gillard started in fashion editorial, later established her own PR company (Gillard Jones Agency) and is now in her new role as a techie. Her first assignment in the field was baptism by fire: She had to produce Focus100, a conference for Black female thought leaders in the industry she was just learning. After a job well done, she cofounded digital undivided in 2013. "My business partner was already in tech and helped guide me through the transition period. She was my entry point [to the field]," she says. "Finding affinity groups and

necessary.

-KIMM D. LETT



in particular. They could also go to a colleague, friend, business associate or relative who's in the field for advice."

DETERMINE WHAT'S EASIEST TO UNDERSTAND, AND BUILD ON IT.

"Whether it's exploring the cloud, trying a new app or building a Web site for your business, figure out what's most comfortable for you, and start there," says Gillard.

• TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ONLINE RESOURCES.

Free sites like khanacademy .com and codeschool .org and the low-cost udemy.com are assets to students of all ages. The self-paced tutorials take the intimidation out of the learning process.

For a more intensive education, Hackbright Academy for women offers

full- and part-time tech and engineering programs. And organizations like Metis and Opportunity Fund earmark scholarships for women and minorities interested in their coding boot camps.

NARROW YOUR FOCUS, THEN CONQUER YOUR GOAL.

Adding tech training to your arsenal can make your credentials shine even brighter. When Kimm D. Lett, 38, a former paralegal and research associate, left the legal field to follow her passion for digital media and advocacy, she also upgraded her tech savvy. "I knew learning HTML was necessary," she says. So she took a webinar at Women Impacting Public Policy and attended classes at New Organizing Institute in Washington, D.C. "Plus, I wanted to expand my résumé, since most positions in advocacy require at least basic knowledge." Now a digital media strategist and consultant, Lett is using her tech skills to look for a position at an advocacy organization. ▷

community is

becoming part of the

ideal for women of color



MOMS TAKE



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NO SICK DAYS, BEST SLEEP WITH A COLD,

MEDICINE. MEDICINE.

MONEY & POWER : TECH SMART

BECOMING AN ENTERPRISING MILLENNIAL

The largest generation in the work-force, millennials are tech literate and perpetually plugged in. Jewel Burks, 26, cofounder and CEO of Partpic, which produces an application that allows users to identify the replacement parts for machines by snapping a photo, agrees that millennials' solution-driven approach to business brings a fresh perspective.

Burks believes that any career can be enhanced with tech knowledge. "Just like you'd be able to communicate with more people if you took the time to learn a new spoken language, coding can help you communicate with developers and engineers," she explains. "I learned the basics of HTML and CSS so I could better understand the front-end developers I'd have to hire and be able to make simple fixes to our Web site without having to pay someone for every little change."

MAX OUT ON MEETUPS.

The value of networking cannot be overstated. Meetup.com is a hotbed of tech activity, from local Women Who



Code meetings to HBCU hackathons that bring programmers and designers together. Gatherings like Tech808, a hip-hop-inspired entrepreneurship conference, and Platform Summit, which unifies thinkers and doers from underrepresented groups in the industry, are other platforms that foster critical relationships.

BE SELF-SERVING WITH YOUR ONLINE TIME.

The cool thing about social media is that it's easier than ever to establish yourself as a thought leader in your field, says Burks. Use live broadcasting apps Periscope or Medium (a blog publishing platform) to create a central hub for

your postings. "Given that the content is appropriate, you can add links to your résumé to display this work to potential employers," Burks adds. That is especially helpful if you don't have a portfolio yet.

TAP INTO THE RIGHT RESOURCES.

Organizations such as Code2040 assist young Black and Latino folks in getting into the tech game. The fellowship program helps students find summer jobs in Silicon Valley and San Francisco and partners with tech companies to assist them in hiring diverse talent. You can also find grants for work that incorporates tech via databases like Foundation Grants to Individuals Online.



RAISING A STEM-SAVVY STUDENT

Students who regularly participate in STEM-focused after-school programs demonstrate heightened critical thinking, methodical problem-solving and excellent comprehension, according to a Noyce Foundation study.

"What's great about STEM is that it's rooted in discovery. Mistakes are promoted as part of the learning process," explains Felecia Hatcher, founder of Black Tech Week and Code Fever, a nonprofit that intersects technology and business to serve minority students in South Florida.

• NURTURE KIDS' ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRITS EARLY.

"There is a saying that kids can legally start a business before they can legally work for someone, but there's not enough conversation about kids and teens monetizing the skills they're learning while they're still young," Hatcher says. Encourage your child to dream up inventions, make app purchases, or enter youth tech and entrepreneurship competitions to give them a business platform (and a chance to make some money).

PUSH EXPLORATION AT HOME.

Learning software programming languages like Scratch, Go and Alice is perfect for young beginners. "I love bubble.is, too," Hatcher says of the Web and mobile application framework. "It's a bit more robust, but it's great for building apps around kids' interests."

CUSTOMIZE YOUR CHILD'S STEM EXPERIENCE.

Community and nonprofit organizations provide youth with informed experiences in tech, social entrepreneurism and philanthropy. Hack the Hood, for example, hires and trains young people of color to create Web sites for small businesses in their communities. Others like Black Girls Code, Techbridge and Girl Scouts' Imagine STEM are dedicated to cultivating and diversifying girls' participation in the field.

Janelle Harris is a writer, editor and entrepreneur in Washington, D.C.



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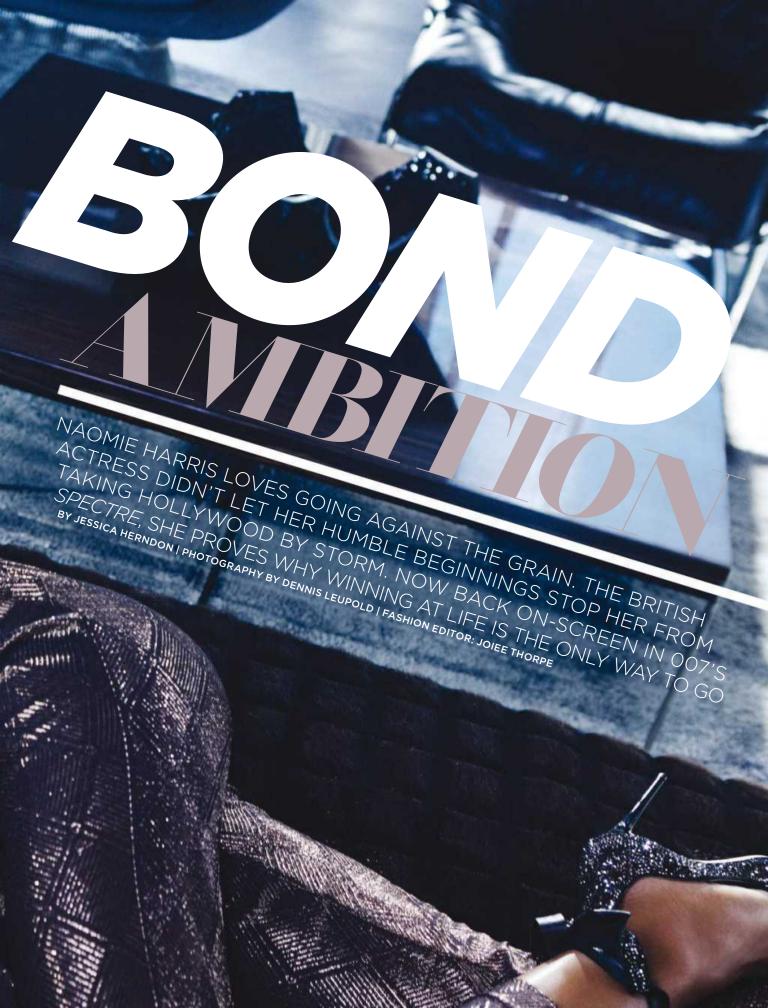
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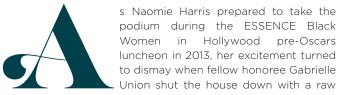


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confession. "I lived for the negativity inflicted on my sister actresses or anyone, I felt, whose shine diminished my own," Union divulged. "I took joy in people's pain, and I tap-danced on their misery.... Real fearless and fierce women admit mistakes, and they work to correct them."

"Gabrielle's speech was so phenomenal, so real and so personal," recalls Harris. "I was in tears." The British actress of Jamaican-Trinidadian descent was so moved that she decided to nix the polite spiel she had prepared, as her words seemed to be "a bit of BS, really," she says, her English accent heavy. "It's not that it wasn't from the heart, but it wasn't entirely about the fact that no matter what level you get to, you're still struggling. I didn't want to get up there and say, 'Oh, things are so wonderful. My life is amazing.' I wanted to be truthful."

The truth was that despite starring in more than 20 films, including the hugely successful James Bond and *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchises, she still carries baggage from her past. Her parents, who were teens when they had her, split before she was born. She says she had contact with her dad only intermittently throughout her young life. "It's a huge rejection not to be wanted by your father," she says. To start repairing her childhood wounds, she embarked on an intense weeklong course last May. "The big issue for me is trust, that I'm not going to be abandoned."

Now, things are much sweeter for the 39-year-old. Armed with plenty of confidence, she's riding the wave of a fruitful 2015: She starred in the boxing saga *Southpaw*, the thriller *Our Kind of Traitor*, and the latest Bond spectacle, *Spectre* (in theaters now), as the sharp and sexy Eve Moneypenny—a role she reprised after appearing in 2012's *Skyfall*. "I'm at a point of being really open to wherever life leads me," she says.

On the day we meet, Harris leads me to The Gourmandise School of Sweets and Savories in Santa Monica for a private cooking class. As we eye the menu, she ties an apron around her ridiculously petite waist and admits this is the first culinary class she's ever taken. The actress is on a self-improvement kick that stretches beyond family troubles: She would love to be better in the kitchen. She says she dreams of whipping up a decadent meal just as her mother does. "I'm trying to step it up," she says, while cautiously adding lemon and salt to the Romesco sauce we're preparing. Perhaps if she's successful, she'll be allowed to help cook come Christmas instead of being left to wrap gifts. "My mom and stepdad throw a massive feast, but they keep me away from the kitchen because they don't think I'm good enough."

Catch her on a movie set and it's a different story. Acting is what she is meant to do. "She's got this range that's impressive—but without straining to impress," says Alfre Woodard, who honored Harris at her annual Oscars Sistahs Soiree in 2014.

"Naomie disappears into the moment to become a real person you believe no matter what character she's playing. Even if it's something fantastic like Moneypenny, where she's strong, smart, beautiful. Or the role of the social worker in *Southpaw*, which was very hard to do because Jake [Gyllenhaal, who played a boxer] kicked ass! She pulls at your heartstrings."

It's this sincerity that fellow British actor David Oyelowo, who worked with Harris in TV dramas that aired in the U.K., lauds most. "There is a moment in the miniseries *Small Island*, where I've married her, and I'm expecting my due on our wedding night and I stand before her in all my glory. I had a patch keeping my dignity covered," he says with a laugh. "Oh, my God, she was so mortified. What I love about her is her sweetness despite her being this sexy, beautiful woman. It always impresses me just how thorough she is. She is someone who leaves no stone unturned."

Being assiduous is what makes Harris such a force onscreen. But she also knows when to take a step back. After playing Winnie Mandela in 2013's *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, she says, "I didn't want to go on any harrowing journeys. I was like, 'As light as possible please.' It had just been too dark, that character.... I did so much research to find her, and I obviously met her. I felt like she got under my skin in a way that no other character had, and that was great because I was able to channel her, and I'm really proud of my performance. But it also meant that it was difficult to let go of her." So Harris took the lighthearted family route with her turn as she-wolf Nisha in Andy Serkis's *Jungle Book: Origins*. "I got to run around on all fours and howl," says Harris of the motion-capture film, slated to hit theaters in 2017. "It felt so liberating and was so much fun."

She also took her current role in *Spectre* for the pure joy of it. "It's completely amazing and life-changing," she gushes. "It's a franchise I grew up watching, and I never thought in a million years I would be part of it." She's proud to continue the tradition of strong Black female leads in Bond films, like Grace Jones and Halle Berry. "That's incredible," she adds, "and feels like such an achievement."

Gone are the days when Harris was living on welfare while being raised in North London's Finsbury Park by a teenage single mother. Determined to provide for her daughter, Harris's mother eventually went to college. "We would come home and do our homework together," remembers Harris, whose mom became a successful writer. "I grew up reading her scripts."

By age 9, Harris was enrolled in the Anna Scher Theatre school and began booking TV roles. After studying social and political science at the University of Cambridge in England, she attended Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. "I always knew I was going to be an actress," says the star, who still lives in North London. But after drama school, she went nine months without a gig before landing her breakout role in Danny Boyle's 28 Days Later. "At the time I thought my life was coming to an end," she recalls. "Looking back, it's like, little did I know that that's the life of being an actor." Boyle's 2002 zombie horror film "changed everything," she says. "I had agents from the U.S. coming over to the U.K. to sign D



me, and I went off to do After the Sunset with Brett Ratner. Then my career just started from there."

Roles in films like Miami Vice and Street Kings followed. While appearing in the National Theatre Live production of Frankenstein opposite Benedict Cumberbatch in 2011, Harris caught the eye of director Sam Mendes and casting director Debbie McWilliams. They offered her the part in Skyfall. Daniel Craig, who has played James Bond in the last four 007 installments, was one of her early champions. "I certainly didn't need any encouragement for her to be cast," he says. "I had admired Naomie's work for a long time, and I knew that she would be perfect as Ms. Moneypenny. She has great integrity as an actress and a tremendous range. I always look forward to the days she's on set. She is a consummate professional."

Silenced were those who said she "shouldn't be an actress because it's such a precarious profession and you'll never be able to make a living out of it," Harris asserts. "But I've always followed my gut. I have to continue to do that because it's always steered me right."

At 38, she says her gut was telling her to deal with her father's absence, which left her struggling with issues of abandonment. Her answer was the Hoffman Process, which is a retreat program for people who feel stuck due to negative behaviors developed in childhood. "Some of the stuff happens when you're so young, and you don't even know what you're missing out on," says Harris. "You get into habits of relating that aren't necessarily healthy. I just wanted to get that perspective of my childhood. You have to delve into the fire and experience and discover where an issue really lies and deal with it."

These days the actress is "the happiest I've ever been," she says. "I was able to reach a point of forgiveness for my father, which has been incredibly healing for me. I think the thing I was asking of my dad—to be able to father me at 18 years old he was not capable of doing. A big part of the healing experience was understanding where my dad came from. Now that I am older, I'm able to understand the decision my father made

not to be part of my life when I was growing up. I have learned to put myself in his shoes and have empathy for his choice. There is no animosity between us."

Has her relationship with her father affected how she dealt with men? "There were areas of damage I wanted to heal so I could have better relationships," she says. "But every relationship is a reflection of your relationship with yourself. It's never really about the other person." While she'd rather not dive into the minutiae of her dating life, discussing men brings the sass—and a childlike giggle—out of the polished Brit. It's no surprise the ability to commit is a trait she looks for, but she's also into a straight-talkin' fella. "Honesty is really hot as sh --!" she says.

Her desire to keep it real and continue on a path of selfimprovement is why she'll remain such a dynamic artist. "I don't guit," says Harris, who could have easily thrown in the towel after feeling extremely lonely at Cambridge due to the lack of racial diversity. "In the U.K., race is very linked with class," she says. "I'm from a working-class family. I was in an environment with people from privileged backgrounds. It was difficult to find ways to relate." But she was determined to go the distance. "I wanted to achieve that degree, and I'm really proud of it," she continues. "It's important, as a Black woman, to have that. It puts out a good message and inspires young people. Where I come from, people don't usually end up at Cambridge, but I did that. To be able to say that, you have to walk that." Still, she acknowledges, "I'm in a process of growth for greater strength and connection to myself, but there's still so much growing to do. I like to take a breath and ask, What do I feel inspired to do next? That's how I do it." □



Jessica Herndon (@SomeKind) is a Los Angeles writer. Her work has appeared in People and Nylon magazines and in the Associated Press.



EMBRACE YOUR INNER DIVA
AND TURN UP THE GLAM FOR THE HOLIDAYS

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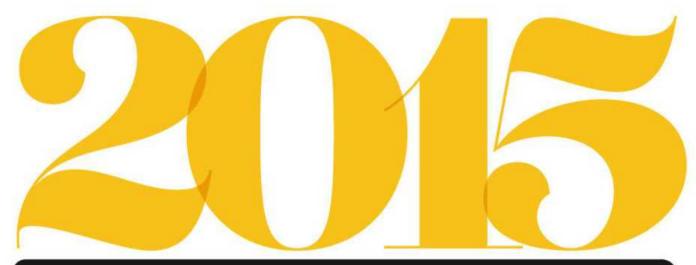












A LOOK BACK AT THE YEAR IN BLACK CULTURE

THESE MOMENTS INSPIRED US, CRACKED US UP, DEVASTATED US AND LEFT US SCRATCHING OUR HEADS. REMINISCE WITH WRITER **DANIELLE HENDERSON** AS SHE DISSECTS 2015 ONE MONTH AT A TIME ILLUSTRATIONS BY GLEN HANSON

JANUARY

It was a rough start to the New Year-Bobbi Kristina Brown, the 21-year-old daughter of Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown, was found unconscious in a bathtub in her home. Things picked up when Uzo Aduba gave a tearinducing speech after she won a SAG Award for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Comedy Series, but then Madonna filled a rage hole in our hearts when she promoted her new album by Photoshopping ropes over the faces of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela. Thankfully, we were able to hop off the emotional roller coaster when a little show called *Empire* premiered on Fox.

FEBRUARY

What was more surprising: the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences failing to nominate a person of color for an Oscar in any of the acting categories even though *Selma* was eligible, **Missy Elliott**'s Super Bowl appearance, or the touching Black Lives Matter tribute during **D'Angelo**'s performance on *Saturday Night Live*? None of these. The biggest surprise was that **Beyoncé** launched a vegan meal delivery service. You can't rule the world if you're constantly full of cheese.

MARCH

The Transportation Security Administration agreed to retrain agents on how to search Black women's hair at airports, so we could finally stop getting all up in our feelings every time we took a flight. Scandal's "The Lawn Chair" episode focused on police brutality and simultaneously gave us a break from the Olivia/Fitz cycle of romantic violence. Black excellence was on full alert this month—Rihanna became the first Black ambassador of Dior, Jay Z launched the music streaming service Tidal, Kendrick Lamar released "To

Pimp a Butterfly" and **Tituss Burgess** sang his way right into our hearts with a truly moving, ad-libbed song about wine on *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*.

APRIL

When 25-yearold Baltimore resident **Freddie Gray** died in police custody under suspicious circumstances, we were thrown into a tornado of disbelief and confusion about how and why this keeps happening. Eight days later, Loretta Lynch was finally sworn in as the first Black female U.S. Attorney General, and she made quick work of starting a civil rights probe into the case. Activist and Grey's Anatomy actor Jesse Williams prompted us to use broken heart emojis with his insightful tweets on the Black Lives Matter movement. Speaking of hearts, Ava DuVernay was honored by Barbie with her own doll, and actress Amandla Stenberg's viral video about cultural appropriation turned us into clapping, hand-waving believers that children really are the future. We

> waved our hands in a different way when **NeNe Leakes** broke down in a flood of tears and left during the Real Housewives of Atlanta

> > reunion. Girl, bye.

►MAY

Prince released a Freddie Gray tribute song and brought his Afro to Baltimore to headline the Rally 4 Peace benefit;
Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj released the "Feeling Myself" video on Tidal and wore matching outfits to their cheeseburgereating party. Queen

Latifah blazed in Bessie, the HBO biopic about legendary blues singer Bessie Smith. But the shining star of this month, this year and possibly this lifetime was 2-year-old Riley Curry, daughter of NBA MVP Stephen Curry of the Golden State Warriors, with her supercute antics at the Western Conference Finals press conferences.

JUNE

Just in case we were worried that art doesn't imitate life anymore, basketball stars and future soap opera cast members Brittney Griner and Glory Johnson had their marriage annulled within a month of walking down the aisle and in the midst of domestic violence claims. Johnson was pregnant with twins. Sean Combs was arrested and accused of assault after threatening his son's football coach with a kettlebell. Rachel Dolezal took Black Like Me a little too seriously: She had masqueraded as a Black woman for years and even became president of her local NAACP chapter. When she got busted, the world was sent into a frenzy of discussion about what it means to be Black. The heartbreaking, racially motivated massacre at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, left us all in a daze. In response, Bree Newsome soared into history when she climbed a pole and removed the Confederate flag from the front of the South Carolina statehouse. Janet Jackson saw our Bat signal and sensed how much we needed her, so she released her first single in seven years, "No Sleeep," shortly after she won the inaugural BET Ultimate Icon: Music Dance Visual Award.

JULY

The misery train went full steam ahead this month. **Bobbi Kristina Brown** died, and the #IfIDieInPoliceCustody hashtag gained traction when **Sandra Bland** was found hanged in her jail cell after being arrested for a minor traffic violation. **Key** and **Peele**

decided to end their show, and a powerful New York magazine cover depicting 35 women who've accused Bill Cosby of sexual assault dropped shortly after court documents revealed Cosby admitted to drugging women. There was some injection of joy into our lives when Serena Williams won Wimbledon, and Magic Mike XXL somehow managed to make a movie about male strippers feel like a fem-

inist extravaganza, and even included **Donald Glover**'s soft-talking poetry disguised as rap.

AUGUST

Civil rights leader **Julian Bond** died at age 75, and Broadway star **Kyle Jean-**

tried to explain diversity in Hollywood to Black movie producer Effie Brown. And our Ava DuVernay struck again with her Apple commercial featuring Kerry Washington, Mary J. Blige and Taraji P. Henson. Wasn't it so much fun to see a group of carefree Black women cutting up and dancing around to an old-school mixtape? Grace Jones released a memoir, and Viola Davis gave an unbelievable acceptance speech at the Emmys that brought people to their feet and Hollywood to its knees when she said, "The only thing that separates women of color from anyone else is opportunity."

POCTOBER-DECEMBER

These might be the months we all go into straight-up hibernation after looking



Janet Jackson saw our Bat signal and sensed how much we needed her.



Baptiste, the first Black actor to play the lead role in Les Misérables, lost his life at age 21 after falling from a fire escape. The N.W.A biopic Straight Outta Compton premiered to huge numbers; and even though the movie skipped over the terrible ways the group treated women, Dr. Dre apologized publicly to "the women that I've hurt." Better 24 years late than never? A state of emergency was declared in Ferguson on the anniversary of Mike Brown's death.

SEPTEMBER

Ta-Nehisi Coates revealed that he will write a Black Panther comic for Marvel, and then he won а MacArthur Genius grant. please remind your parents that comic books are not only good for you but could also one day help you land a grant for more than half a million dollars. Matt Damon earned the scorn of social media when he back at all we've been through. Let's keep the senseless killings and secret albums to a minimum—there's a new **Idris Elba** movie available on Netflix.

Danielle Henderson (@knottyyarn) is a New York City-based writer and the author of *Feminist Ryan Gosling* (Running Press).







THE REPUBLICANS





DONALD TRUMP

MY TAKE: Trump's presence among the Republican candidates has upended

conventional wisdom. But his early success in the polls is just a symptom of the inner turmoil within the GOP that led to its chaotic search for a new speaker of the House after John Boehner's sudden resignation in the fall. Boehner's likely successor, Kevin McCarthy, withdrew his name from consideration, and Paul Ryan, another supposed favorite, hesitated for days before reluctantly agreeing to run. What's more: The Tea Party now has enough votes to block anyone from becoming speaker.

Trump, however, has exhibited a staying power that puts him in a different league from prior flavor-ofthe-month candidates, such as businessman Herman Cain or former Congresswoman Michele Bachmann. Trump knows how to work the media, and what he says—even his most outrageous declarations-resonates with a certain segment of the American population. Still, he doesn't have the full backing of the one person he needs in order to win: himself. His recent statements about quitting if he's not winning reveal a man who may no longer be having fun. And having fun is probably the real reason Trump is running in the first place.

VERDICT: Trump simply doesn't want the presidency—certainly not badly enough. He will eventually withdraw.



BEN CARSON

MY TAKE: Dr. Carson benefits from the antiestablishment movement

gripping the GOP base. But he lacks Trump's bravado and bluster and will certainly wither under intense media scrutiny. His public utterances are often troublesome—and not just in a partisan politics kind of way. His assertion that the Oregon shooting victims should have bum-rushed the shooter, for example, was artless and bizarre.

VERDICT: He's a soft-spoken man, but once people really start listening to what he's saying, they'll tune him out.



CARLY FIORINA

MY TAKE: Fiorina is another nonpolitician who's riding the anti-Washington wave.

She is in lockstep with the far right on health care (repeal Obamacare) but not on other issues, such as climate change. (She agrees that it is man-made: "A single nation acting alone can make no difference at all," she has said.)

Fiorina will also likely collapse under close examination. Remember, she has a sketchy business record from her time as CEO of Hewlett-Packard. Her major accomplishment there, buying Compag, was "a huge loser for HP shareholders," Fortune reported. Such leadership snafus made it easy for California senator Barbara Boxer to cudgel Fiorina in the 2010 Senate race. But Fiorina has had five years to hone her responses to those criticisms. It showed in her early debate performance, particularly in her rejoinders to Trump. She is forceful and wellspoken, and she may survive even with all her drawbacks.

VERDICT: Despite her flaws, she is the most realistic outsider candidate.



JEB BUSH

MY TAKE: Even with all his resources, the former Florida governor may be

the establishment figure the Republicans sacrifice to the political gods. His pedigree and dynastic ties epitomize everything the current GOP base despises. Thus far, he's simply not a

good candidate. He makes as many embarrassing gaffes as Carson, and he looks like he's having even less fun than Trump. Up to this point, Bush's campaign has largely been reactive and reduced to a defense of his brother's terms in the White House. Once seen as inevitable, he has been forced to focus much of his time responding to Trump's jabs. Additionally, Bush's polling numbers are low, and he's struggling.

VERDICT: Despite having a massive amount of money and being the establishment candidate, Bush isn't getting the base to warm up to him, which does not bode well.



MARCO RUBIO

MY TAKE: In 2013, Florida senator Rubio proposed a reasonable and compre-

hensive immigration reform plan, and he has been paying for it ever since. Nonetheless, Rubio is still acceptable to a good chunk of the antiestablishment base—primarily because of his conservative positions on health care, guns, abortion and more. He also has youth and charisma on his side.

VERDICT: Rubio is the strongest option in terms of his appeal to all wings of the GOP.



TED CRUZ

MY TAKE: Cruz's game plan to stay in Trump's shadow and gather up his

supporters when he leaves is theoretically viable, but the Texas senator is too polarizing a figure to have a chance in a general election. He's going after the far-right vote, but that doesn't suffice. GOP voters don't like him enough to ignore that.

VERDICT: Cruz—like John Kasich, Rand Paul, Mike Huckabee and Chris Christie—simply doesn't have a shot.

MY PREDICTION: We will see a Rubio/Fiorina ticket. Having a woman and a Hispanic man will paper over the GOP's severe demographics problem—not well enough, but it's the only chance the party has. Both Rubio and Fiorina are very effective speakers (despite Rubio's occasional cotton mouth), and that is absolutely essential.

THE DEMOCRATS





HILLARY CLINTON MY TAKE: Clinton has been dealing with all kinds of problems for several decades

now. She seems to function best while under bombardment, but I can't remember a time when she wasn't being bombarded—from her days as first lady to her time in the Senate to her tenure as secretary of state. Fortunately for her, none of her opponents' salvos packs any real punch. The controversy surrounding her e-mail server during her time as secretary of state has started to sound like the white noise of the right.

Further, the Benghazi accusations are fading—if you don't believe me, ask Kevin McCarthy. The once-favored heir to the House speakership publicly admitted that the Benghazi committee was focused on attacking Clinton.

VERDICT: Clinton will ultimately prevail.



MARTIN O'MALLEY MY TAKE: O'Malley did better

MY TAKE: O'Malley did better than expected in the first Democratic debate. The for-

mer Maryland governor has a good track record and an earnest demeanor. In a race without Clinton, he'd have more appeal. As it is, he remains in the background.

VERDICT: O'Malley gains some traction—but not enough to finish the race to Philadelphia.

Carump's success is a symptom of the inner turmoil within the GOP.



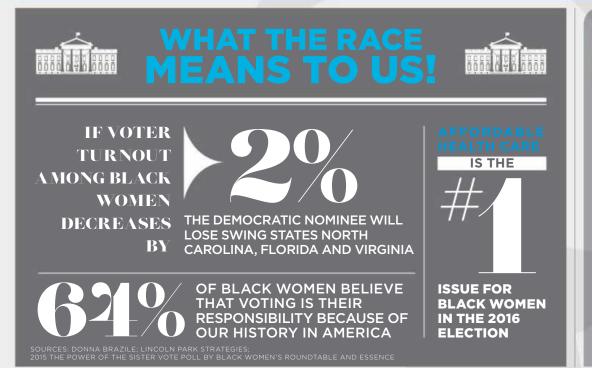
BERNIE SANDERS

MY TAKE: Sanders has done wonders energizing the Democratic base, to the

ultimate benefit of the entire party. The Vermont senator has spoken about income inequality and hammered home the message that we are in danger of becoming an oligarchy. His economic message resonates with voters. However, he doesn't have to appeal to minority voters to re-create the Obama coalition. He can win heavily in predominantly White states like Iowa and New Hampshire, but he runs into trouble in the larger states, where Clinton is better organized.

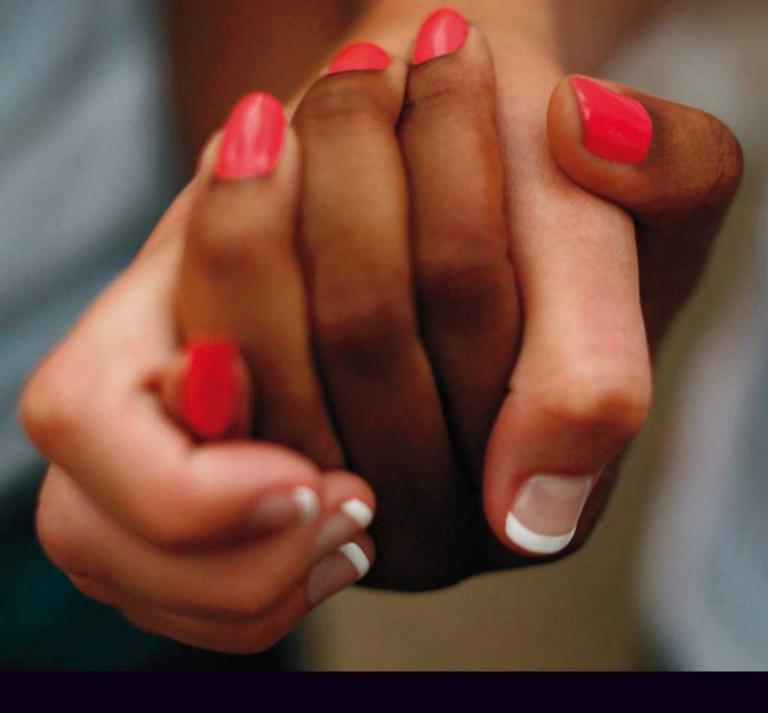
VERDICT: He'll peak early in the race and will eventually leave, but not without having pushed the progressive agenda to the forefront of the campaign and moving Clinton farther to the left.

MY FINAL PREDICTION: Rubio will face off against Clinton, with Clinton winning 53 percent of the popular vote. \Box





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the coming



ROMGRIEF 10 GRACE

THE MURDERS OF NINE CHURCH MEMBERS DURING BIBLE STUDY IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA, SHOOK OUR NATION AND THE WORLD THIS YEAR. NOW THE VICTIMS' FAMILIES SHARE WHY FORGIVENESS WAS THEIR ONLY OPTION BY KRISTAL BRENT ZOOK

ast June our hearts were pierced by the news: Nine church members were killed while worshipping at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church in Charleston. They welcomed Dylann Roof, 21, into their midst that night. He murdered them minutes later.

At Roof's bond hearing, family members of the victims were asked whether they would like to speak. One by one, relatives stood up, expressing pain and sorrow—and also forgiveness and mercy. Alana Simmons, 26, spoke on behalf of her family after losing her grandfather, the Reverend Daniel Simmons, Sr., that fateful summer evening: "Although my grandfather and the other victims died at the hands of hate, everyone's plea for your soul is proof that they lived in love, so hate won't win."

Since then those three words have sparked a movement for Simmons, an elementary music teacher in Norfolk, Virginia, and the oldest of Rev. Simmons's four grandchildren. She was inspired to create the #hatewontwin social media campaign, which now has more than 20,000 Facebook followers. Its nonprofit arm raises money for hate crime victims and educates young people on different races and cultures.

the Council on Contemporary Families. Authentic forgiveness has to come from a place of strength, and a person has to be psychologically ready to do it. "You have to be in a place where it doesn't matter what the other person's response is. It can't be about doing it to get something in return. You can't want revenge."

If forgiveness is done right, the results can truly be miraculous.

"What it's doing is taking something that's eating you alive on the inside and letting go of it, so it's no longer yours to bear," Young says. "That can make healing go faster. It's done in order to move out of a place of despair. It's done because being unforgiving can stall your ability to love again and to have hope for your own future."

Nadine L. Collier lost her mother, Ethel W. Lance, in the Charleston shooting. She was the first member of her family to express forgiveness toward the shooter at the courthouse. "I felt that I had to do that regardless of what had happened to me," she says. "I was taught by my mother not to hold grudges, and I know she would say, 'I need for you to live your life and to forgive him.' I can't hold that animosity in my heart because then I'm going to make myself sick.

SOLUTION AND FAMORATHER AND THE OTHER VICTIMS DIED AT THE HANDS OF HATE, EVERYONE'S PLEA FOR YOUR SOUL IS PROOF THAT THEY LIVED IN LOVE, SO HATE WON'T WIN. 🗣

While Simmons travels across the country spreading the message, some have wondered how the families of The Charleston Nine could forgive so quickly. Editorials have announced, "Black America should stop forgiving white racists," noting that no one expected Americans to forgive terrorists in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

"The spirit of forgiveness has nothing to do with the shooter," Simmons explains. "I didn't do it so he can sleep at night. Forgiveness is not for others. We lost our grandfather. Obviously we're hurting. But there is no way I can carry on my grandfather's legacy while harboring hate."

Daniel Simmons, Jr., Alana's father, agrees. Forgiveness, he says, is "a requirement that God has set for us as Christians. We want to acknowledge the devil and that this was a hate crime. But we also acknowledge God's power over him." His sister Rose Simmons concurs. "My father was a determined individual. Duty was number one to him," says the Newport News, Virginia, musician and hairstylist. "The moment he closed his eyes, mine were opened. I try to remember everything that he ever said to me, and now it's gold."

But how do you forgive exactly when the wounds are still so raw and so deep?

"It can't be forced," says Linda Young, a counseling psychologist in The Woodlands, Texas, and senior scholar at I don't want that feeling—that anger and bitterness."

Collier says she would even listen to the shooter if there ever came a day he wanted to talk. "Because to me, he's a young man," she says. "He's a boy...a child. He hasn't experienced anything."

Still, forgiveness doesn't take the hurt away. Remembering how she used to talk to her mother as many as four times a day, she breaks down and cries. "I'm hurting," she says, "because I know my mom had some more living to do. But I'm not angry. There's a difference."

The Reverend Waltrina Middleton, a cousin of DePayne Middleton, has a different perspective on the topic and talks about what she calls a "rush" to forgiveness. DePayne was like a sister to her, she says. They "grew up literally right next door to each other along with our own two sisters. The four of us were inseparable."

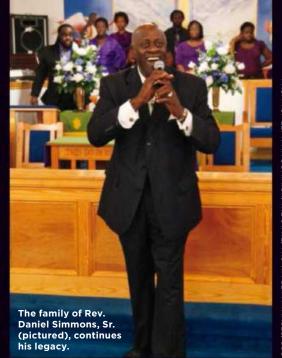
When Bethane Middleton-Brown, DePayne's sister, spoke at the bond hearing, she said she was a "work in progress," notes Rev. Middleton. "She never said in that moment that she or we forgave. This is a narrative that was created by the media, who refused to listen to us to try to understand the heart of our pain and the fact that we are still grieving. With the tragic killing of nine remarkable human beings, the headline dominating the news was 'The Families Forgive.' " ▷

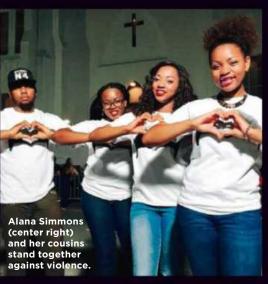














President Obama

So inspired by the grace shown by the Simmons family and all the victims' families in Charleston.

#HateWontWin



"There was a great rush and urgency to get to that headline of forgiveness," she adds, "bypassing the narratives in between." For Rev. Middleton, forgiveness in our society all too often becomes a kind of code for "we don't have to be accountable for our inaction, which perpetuated these acts of violence."

"The truth of the matter is, we have not moved on," Rev. Middleton says. "We still have a real problem of racism, police brutality and a culture of racialized violence in Charleston, in the South and in this country. It is not enough to take down the flag. It is not enough to even catch the young man who murdered our family members. It is not enough if these tragedies continue

Loma K. Flowers, M.D., a University of California at San Francisco clinical professor of psychiatry, agrees that the concept of forgiveness is often misunderstood by those who perpetrate violence and by their victims.

"Too many times you see abusers or cheating spouses who think they have a right to forgiveness just because they've apologized," Flowers says. "No one is entitled to forgiveness, and its true power lies with the party injured, who must experience the full impact. It's important to do all the stages of grief. First shock, then missing the person. The third stage is anger and protest. Then comes despair. Finally you get to detachment, and it's at that stage that you can really decide to forgive."

For the Simmonses-Rose, Alana and Daniel-the act is one demanded by their Christian faith.

"It doesn't mean that I agree with what they did or that I want to suffer at their hands or that I don't get angry or want to get even sometimes," Rose explains. "It's not saying, 'Oh, I forgive you,' lightheartedly. There's a process, and it's painful. It's through tears and a self-truth you must face. That's where you find out who you really are. The battle is between you and your heart." \square

Ending Violence With My Son's Killer

ONE MOTHER HEALS OTHERS TOGETHER WITH THE MAN WHO SHOT HER CHILD



n February of 1993, Mary Johnson-Roy's only son, 20-year-old Laramiun Byrd, was shot in the head and chest at a party in Minneapolis by 16-year-old Oshea Israel. The two young men had never met before that night. Israel received a sentence of 25 and a half years for his crime.

"The root of bitterness ran deep," Johnson-Roy says of the days following Byrd's murder. "Anger set in, and I hated everyone." She stayed that way for more than 12 years, until one day she

read a poem about two angels who had been mothers on this earth: One's child had been murdered, and the other's child was a murderer. "Suddenly I had this vision of creating an organization to support not only the mothers of murdered children but also the mothers of children who had taken a life," she savs. "I knew then that I would never be able to help these mothers if I hadn't forgiven Oshea." Her first meeting with Israel was brokered through Victim Offender Dialogue and initiated by the Department of Correction. She had never been to a prison and was tempted to leave before her son's killer walked into the room. The meeting lasted two hours. "For the first time, I forgave Oshea," she says. At the end, Israel asked if he could hug Johnson-Roy. She agreed.

"As I got up to leave, I felt something rising from the soles of

my feet,

moving up my

body and leaving me," she recalls. "Instantly I had this freedom. I knew the bitterness was over."

In 2005 Johnson-Rov established From Death to Life, a nonprofit in Minneapolis dedicated to ending violence through healing and reconciliation. Israel was released from prison in 2010, and today the two work together, speaking at schools, churches and community centers. "I think forgiveness is mentioned in the Bible more than 65 times. This is not something we can overlook," she says. Johnson-Roy now calls Israel her "spiritual son" and has also forged a bond with his mother. "Forgiveness is letting the anger go and not letting that person have power over you anymore," Johnson-Roy adds.

Visit fromdeathtolife.us for more information.



Kristal Brent Zook (@KristalZook) is the author of Black Women's Lives: Stories of Power and Pain (Nation Books) and a professor of journalism at Hofstra University in New York.

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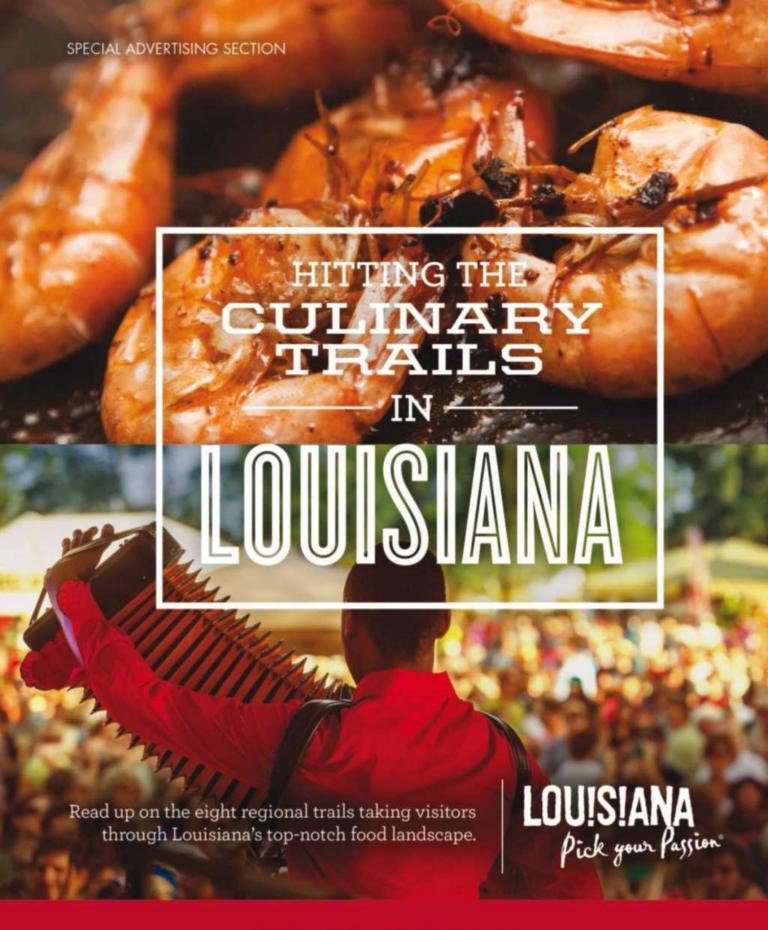




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State of Comisiana

JAY DARDENNE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

POST OFFICE BOX 44243 BATON ROUGE, LA 70804

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to invite you to come to New Orleans for the 2016 ESSENCE Festival, the largest event in the country celebrating African-American culture and music. You will not want to miss the performances by the biggest and brightest musical stars combined with the warm hospitality and vibrant rhythms of New Orleans.

From jazz to zydeco, the sounds that come out of Louisiana are like no other. When performances in the Superdome are over, be sure to check out a few sets at one of our many historic venues. The music is sure to help you work up an appetite, so get a taste of Louisiana during your visit. Indulge in fresh local seafood prepared with our Creole and Cajun flavors. From po'boys found at a hole-in-the-wall

joint to chargrilled oysters from a fine-dining restaurant, you will not be disappointed in the delicious cuisine Louisiana has to offer.



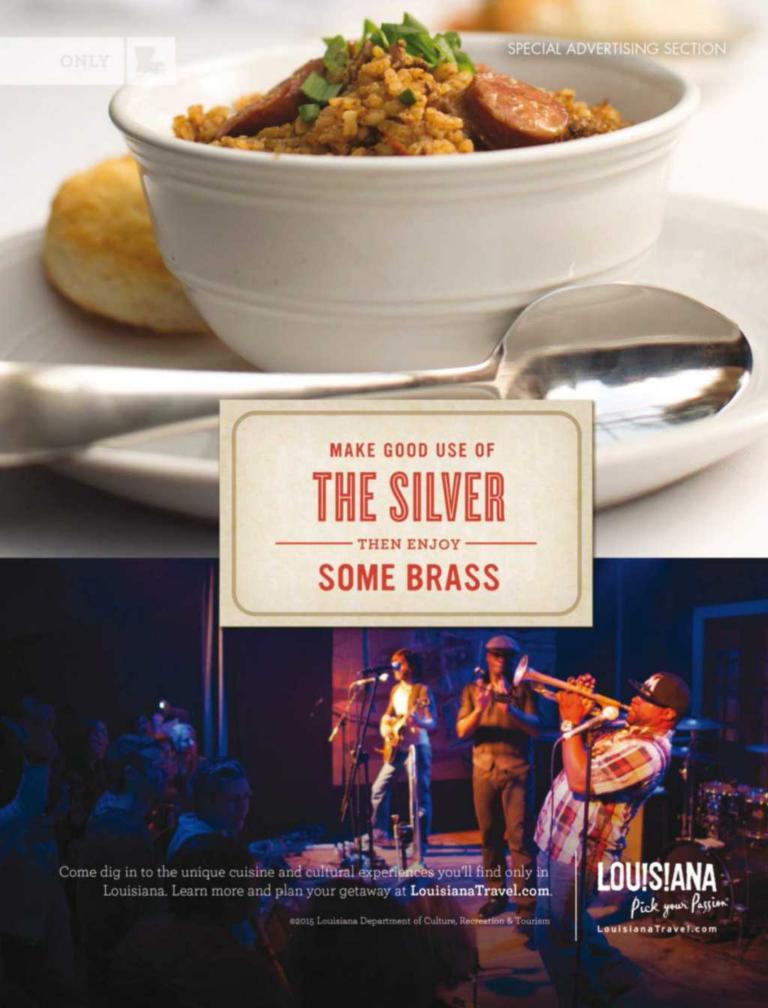
I encourage you to also take some time to explore the rest of Louisiana via our African-American Heritage Trail, which showcases the contributions of African-Americans to Louisiana and our nation. With sites throughout the state, the Trail recognizes pioneers who defied convention and who serve as lasting role models for all of us. For more information on the Trail visit AStoryLikeNoOther.com and for other travel opportunities throughout Louisiana visit LouisianaTravel.com.

We are honored to host you in our great state, so if music is one of your passions, join us for the ESSENCE Festival—just one example of the many sights, sounds, tastes and experiences found only in Louisiana.

Very truly yours,

Jay Dardenne Lieutenant Governor LOUISIANA

LouisianaTravel.com



EXPLORE LOUISIANS CULINARY TRAILS

There is an incredible array of unique flavors and dishes that comprise Louisiana's iconic culinary landscape. Beyond that, there are countless must-try varieties of hallmark local dishes such as gumbo, étouffée, jambalaya and meát pies scattered throughout the state—so much so that finding a way to try them all can be daunting.

To help visitors navigate the many epicurean options and get the most out of their dining experience, the Louisiana Office of Tourism created eight culinary trails highlighting the best flavors and dishes each region has to offer. From crawfish boils and the Boudin Trail to jazz brunches and plate lunches, these guides give visitors a taste of what to expect and leave them hungry for more.

DELTA DELIGHTS

TRAIL 8

LAFAVETTE ST. MARTINVILLE

RED RIVER RICHES

Meat pies and hand-rolled tamales take center stage in central and northwest Louisiana.

TRAIL 7

AKE CHARLES

ALEYANDRIA

PRAIRIE HOME (OOHING

TRAIL 3

JEFFERSON DAVIS

TRAIL 6

Southern country fare gets a distinct Louisiana flair, complemented by the area's wild game.

CAPITAL CRAVINGS

Northshore

TRAIL 2

ST. TAMMANY

Experience the Bayou State's capital city and dine at the majestic plantations lining the Mississippi River.

NORTHSHORE SAMPLER

See beautiful historic downtown areas and enjoy lakefront dining along the shores of Lake Pontchartrain.

PRAIRIE HOME COOKING

Throughout Louisiana's heartland, visitors get their fill of smoked meats, served up with a side of zydeco.

BAYOU BOUNTY

CAPITAL

TRAIL 4

BATON ROUGE

Cajun hospitality rules in Louisiana's Acadiana region. Its hearty gumbos and crawfish dishes are not to be missed.

TRAIL 5

SEAFOOD SENSATION

Whether fried, baked or broiled, the Gulf seafood in Lake Charles and southwest Louisiana is unbeatable.

CREOLE CRESCENT

TRAIL 1

From New Orleans to the Gulf of Mexico, explore the area's history, jazz music and Creole flair.



Southern hospitality meets Louisiana flair in the Mississippi Delta. Also known as Sportsman's Paradise, it maintains its reputation with a bounty of wild game, including ducks, deer and wild hogs.

Local chefs such as Chopped champion Cory Bahr make the most of the local fauna. At Restaurant Cotton in Monroe Bahr serves tender, flavorful Muscovy duck wrapped in smoked bacon and stuffed with jalapeño and cream cheese. Down the street at Restaurant Sage, diners can feast on local beef from Kingsland Ranch and lamb from Abby Ridge Farm, when available.

Wild game is not the only thing on the menu in the Bayou

State's northeast corner. Southern-style plate lunches are available at local haunts, and West Monroe is home to one of the state's largest wineries, Landry Vineyards. They use a unique blend of native grapes and entertain visitors in their tasting room, located on the vineyard's sprawling 20-acre plot.

Between major hunting seasons, thousands of visitors descend on the small city of Ruston for its annual Peach Festival. The family fun includes a peach-eating contest, great local music and arts and crafts.

South Louisiana gets a lot of attention for its signature dishes, but the northern part of the state has a flavor all its own.

Traditional Bayou State flavors are fused with Spanish and Southern flavors and techniques to make a unique cuisine.



CHEF HIGHLIGHT CORY BAHR, RESTAURANT COTTON

Chef Cory Bahr put Monroe on the culinary map by "doing his own thing." His north Louisiana culsine more resembles soul food than traditional French-Creole cooking and you're likely to see hot water combread, field peas

with smoked bacon and smothered squash on Cotton's menus.

A fisherman himself, Bahr brings in plenty of Louislana Seafood and celebrates the whole state's culinary heritage.

In most places, pie is saved until the end of the meal, but in 300-year-old
Natchitoches, savory meat pies are the main course. Similar to an empanada, the crescent-shaped, hand-held pies are typically filled with beef but are often stuffed with crawfish or even boudin. For those with a sweet tooth, a quick stop at Lea's Lunchroom in Lecompte is sure to satisfy. The pecan pie and any of the meringue-topped pies are worth a special trip.

Tamales are another regional gem that celebrate the area's Spanish and American Indian influences. At the annual Zwolle Tamale Fiesta, locals outdo themselves by serving up the best tamales in the South.

Like Cajun and Creole Louisiana, north Louisiana has a long, storied musical tradition. Shreveport's Municipal Auditorium launched the careers of some of the greatest names in country, western and rockabilly music, including Elvis Presley, Hank Williams and Johnny Cash.

While in town, visitors should take in the natural beauty and tremendous fishing opportunities—of Toledo Bend Lake and Caddo Lake.

EAT LIKE A LOCAL

MUSCOVY DUCK WRAPS: Restaurant Cotton (Monroe)

PAN-FRIED TROUT WITH CRAWFISH MEUNIERE: Restaurant Sage (Monroe)

CHICKEN FRIED STEAK SANDWICH: EW Thompson Drug Co. (Delhi)

EAT LIKE A LOCAL

BLUE PLATE SPECIALS: Southfield Grill (Shreveport)

ICE BOX PIES: Strawn's Eat Shop (Shreveport)

MEAT PIES: Lasyone's Meat Pie Restaurant (Natchitoches)



In the center of Louisiana, Cajun culture meets the prairie. Here, the best dishes come straight from the smokehouse.

Many of the local favorites in this central region are made all the more special through the use of locally sourced ingredients. Fresh boudin uses meat from local farms, hot crawfish bread is filled with fresh seafood fished right out of the local waters—and the best way to wash it all down is with an ice-cold, locally brewed beer.

Communities such as Mansura still get together for community boucheries. At these wholepig cookouts, families, friends and strangers alike come together to "pass a good time" while every part of the pig is cooked in a variety of ways over an open fire. But like so many things in Louisiana, it is not just about cooking and eating. Live zydeco music with rhythmic washboards, bellowing accordions and feverish fiddlin' sets the stage for dancing long into the evening. Make sure to catch Mansura's Cochon de Lait Festival, which is held each year over Mother's Day weekend.

Whether just driving through the area or staying for a while, cracklins are a must-try local snack. The slow-fried, crispy pig skin usually comes sprinkled with Cajun seasoning and has just the right blend of salty, savory and spicy to make it irresistible.

EAT LIKE A LOCAL

SWEET DOUGH PIES: Kitchen Shop (Grand Coteau)
FRIED CHICKEN: Mama's Fried Chicken (Opelousas)
CRACKLINS: Bourque's Supermarket (Port Barre)

CAPITAL CRAVINGS

A trip to Louisiana's state capital, Baton Rouge, shows visitors how much the area has to offer. With its revitalized downtown and flourishing food scene, there's a little something for everyone.

Upscale dining options abound, with locals frequenting Juban's for the miraculous Hallelujah Crab and Beausoleil for its contemporary Louisiana cuisine. But fancy meals are not all the city has to offer: its own craft beer at Tin Roof Brewing Co., delicious po'boys at George's and artisanal

charcuterie at City Pork are sure to satisfy.

A short drive from Baton
Rouge, the beautiful plantation
homes that dot the mighty
Mississippi's River Road
enchant visitors. The lush
grounds of Houmas House
and Gardens and Nottoway
Plantation exhibit not only
gorgeous re-creations of the
region's storied past, but also
offer luxury accommodations
and fine dining.

Take a break from plantationhopping and visit historic Donaldsonville where antiques

shops abound and the Grapevine Café serves classic gumbos and an incomparable bread pudding. Don't miss the River Road African American Museum, a museum dedicated to the history and heritage of African-Americans along the Mississippi River.



CHEF HIGHLIGHT CODY & SAMANTHA CARROLL, HOT TAILS

Husband-and-wife team Cody and Samantha Carroll met in culinary school before opening Hot Tails in New Roads, La. Described as "Hardcore South Louisiana Cuisine," the

restaurant focuses on Louisiana Seafood and is particularly well known for its Sunday Southern Brunch. The couple, who won the 2013 King of Louisiana Seafood title, recently opened Sac-A-Lait in New Orleans, emphasizing their unique interpretations of centuries-old culinary traditions.

EAT LIKE A LOCAL

GUMBO: The Chimes (Baton Rouge)

CRAWFISH BREAD: Hot Tails Restaurant (New Roads)

BOUDIN BALLS: Tony's Seafood (Baton Rouge)

NORTHSHORE SAMPLER / SEAFOOD SENSATION

The Northshore is a perfect location for a weekend getaway. Across Lake Pontchartrain from New Orleans,

visitors will find vibrant historic communities with wonderful boutiques, elegant eateries and mom-and-pop diners.

Downtown Covington is home to a bustling farmers' market and scores of restaurants full of local charm. The husbandand-wife team behind LOLA turned a train caboose into the restaurant's kitchen, where they create fresh, locally inspired lunches and weekend dinners. A few blocks away are the upscale Italian Del Porto Ristorante and Oxlot 9.

In nearby Lacombe, visitors

will find John Besh's La Provence. The restaurant specializes in rustic French fare and many of the ingredients are sourced from the on-site garden. Make sure to try dishes such as Oysters "Ooh La La," which comes with a crab fat butter crust, saffron and chili flakes, or the classic Crispy Gulf Drum topped with jumbo lump crabmeat, mushrooms and a brown butter hollandaise.

And beer enthusiasts can rejoice! Covington Brewhouse, Chafunkta Brewing Company and Gnarly Barley Brewing Company have joined Abita Brewing Company in Louisiana craft beer excellence. Luckily, the Louisiana Brewery Trail connects them all.

EAT LIKE A LOCAL

THIN FRIED CATFISH: Middendorf's (Akers) BRUNCH: Palmetto's On The Bayou (Slidell) LUMP CRABMEAT AND BRIE SOUP: The Dakota Restaurant (Covington)



CHARLES

Award-winning chef Lyle Broussard is legendary for his Cajun and Creole flavors and the local culture comes through in every one of his dishes.

His passion for southwest Louisiana culture and cuisine dates back to time spent perched next to his grandmother's stovetop learning everything he could, from the secret to a potent roux to the best way to season catfish. He oversees a menu known for bold BBO selections, off-the-grill entrees and savory specials cooked up with a taste of his authentic Louisiana roots.

In southwest Louisiana, seafood is king. With direct access to the Gulf and numerous rivers, lakes and bays, fresh fish, crabs and

crawfish can always be found on restaurant menus and in local seafood shops. Steamboat Bill's in Lake Charles serves up some of the region's most recognizable dishes including fried seafood platters and perfectly seasoned crawfish.

The region is also known for its rice fields, which double as crawfish ponds during the spring. This unlikely marriage between grain and crustacean extends to the plate, with diners feasting on crawfish boudin and heaping bowls of crawfish étouffée and jambalaya.

Boudin, an artisanal pork and rice sausage, shares the stage

with seafood in southwest Louisiana. The local staple is available fresh, smoked, steamed and fried at corner stores and fine dining establishments alike. Visitors can see the whole process at the Sausage Link in Sulphur and then have a taste next door at LeBleu's Landing. (Hint: Be sure to try their smoked, fried, bacon-wrapped boudin.)

Newer to the region is Louisiana Spirits, the first distillery in the state to use Louisiana cane sugar exclusively. Its Bayou Rum collection appears in craft cocktails throughout the state.

While tasting their way through the Seafood Sensation Trail, visitors should also take a spin down the Creole Nature Trail All-American Road, a 180-mile track through the region's picturesque wetlands.

EAT LIKE A LOCAL

BOILED CRAWFISH (SEASONAL): Steamboat Bill's (Lake Charles)

HOMEMADE BOUDIN: The Boiling Point (Sulphur) DAILY PLATE LUNCHES: Evangeline's Café and Bakery (Jennings)



CREOLE CRESCENT

Get ready for a big time on the bayou. Crawfish, boudin and hot sauce will get your taste buds hopping, but the Cajun bands at local restaurants with dance halls—such as local favorite Prejean's—will keep you rocking late into the night.

In downtown Lafayette, diners have terrific local options such as Johnson's Boucanière which cranks out fresh boudin daily and serves it a variety of ways.

A must-try is the Parrain Special, a grilled cheese sandwich stuffed with a fried boudin ball and slathered in house-made barbecue

sauce. For breakfast or brunch, a trip to The French Press is essential.

Traveling southeast down the scenic Old Spanish Trail, visitors can follow Bayou Teche as it winds its way toward the Gulf Coast. Along the way are local gems such as the Yellow Bowl Restaurant in Jeanerette, which serves a mean crawfish étouffée.

Those with a taste for heat can get their fill at Avery Island, the home of TABASCO® hot sauce. Along with a factory tour and general store—where visitors can purchase salt mined on the island, as well as

other exclusive products—one should not miss the Jungle Gardens, featuring 170 rolling acres of semitropical foliage and abundant wildlife along the Bayou Petite Anse.

It's worth noting that this trail cuts across the heart of Cajun country, so don't be surprised if you hear French-speaking locals while you're soaking up all that their culture has to offer.

EAT LIKE A LOCAL

CHARGRILLED OYSTERS: Cristiano Ristorante (Houma)
FRIED SHRIMP POOR BOY: Olde Tyme Grocery (Lafayette)
SOFT SHELL CRAB LAFOURCHE: Fremin's Restaurant
(Thibodaux)

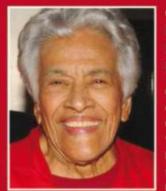
New Orleans has been fine-tuning its menus for close to 300 years. Its traditions blend American Indian, French, Spanish and African ingredients and techniques into one extraordinary cuisine. Storied white tablecloth restaurants and local dives alike serve up classic dishes day in and day out.

SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

New Orleans is a city where chefs are superstars. From Emeril Lagasse to John Besh, the city's culinary elite take tried-andtrue recipes and add their signature spins, creating an everevolving local cuisine. The food doesn't have to be extravagant

> to be great, overstuffed po'boys and savory muffalettas are a delicious part of the daily roster for both locals and visitors.

> New Orleans-style barbecue shrimp is another tantalizing favorite, though its name is a bit misleading. Here, the shrimp are doused in a well-seasoned, buttery broth and then finished on the stovetop or in the oven rather than grilled. Visitors will find several different interpretations, from the original at Pascal's Manale Uptown to a po'boy version in Mid-City at Liuzza's By the Track.



CHEF HIGHLIGHT LEAH CHASE, DOOKY CHASE'S RESTAURANT

Chef, cookbook author and cooking show host Leah Chase is widely known as the "Queen of Creole Cuisine." The Madisonville, La. native began working at Dooky Chase's Restaurant—then owned by

her husband's family—in the 1950s, and eventually took over the business. Dooky Chase's was a gathering spot for prominent civil rights leaders when African-Americans were still banned from white-owned restaurants, and went on to host luminaries such as Quincy Jones, Duke Ellington and President Barack Obama.

The Jefferson Parish Oyster Trail stretches from Bucktown in Metairie to the sandy beaches of Grand Isle on the Gulf of Mexico. More than a dozen restaurants along the trail serve variations of the bivalve, with preparations ranging from raw on the half-shell to melt-in-your-mouth chargrilled oysters.

EAT LIKE A LOCAL

CHARGRILLED OYSTERS: Drago's Seafood Restaurant (Metairie) SURF AND TURF POOR BOY: Parkway Bakery & Tavern (New Orleans)

RED BEANS AND RICE: Felix's Restaurant and Oyster Bar (New Orleans)

SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

LOUISIANA'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL

Just like music tells a story, Louisiana's African-American Heritage Trail brings together histories, personalities and achievements in a way that no single museum ever could. Visit AStoryLikeNoOther.com for stories, photos and itineraries.

Discover these locations on the trail:

- New Orleans African-American Museum (New Orleans)
- 2. St. Augustine Catholic Church (New Orleans)
- 3. St. Louis Cemeteries No.1 & No.2 (New Orleans)
- 4. The French Market (New Orleans)
- 5. Congo Square, Armstrong Park (New Orleans)
- 6. The Amistad Research Center (New Orleans)
- Mahalia Jackson's Grave, Providence Park Cemetery (Metairie)
- 8. Laura Plantation (Vacherie)
- 9. Evergreen Plantation (Wallace)
- River Road African-American Museum (Donaldsonville)
- Tangipahoa African-American Heritage Museum (Hammond)
- 12. Louisiana State Capitol (Baton Rouge)
- 13. Southern University (Baton Rouge)
- 14. Port Hudson State Historic Site (Jackson)
- 15. The African-American Museum (St. Martinville)
- Black Heritage Art Gallery, Central School Arts and Humanities Center (Lake Charles)
- 17. The Creole Heritage Folk Life Center (Opelousas)
- Arna Bontemps African-American Heritage Museum (Alexandria)
- 19. St. Augustine Church (Natchez)
- Cane River Creole National Historical Park (Bermuda, Derry)
- 21. Melrose Plantation (Melrose)
- 22. Multicultural Center of the South (Shreveport)
- 23. Southern University Museum of Art (Shreveport)
- 24. Grambling State University (Grambling)
- The Northeast Louisiana Delta African American Heritage Museum (Monroe)
- 26. The Hermione Museum (Tallulah)
- 27. Winter Quarters State Historic Site (Newellton)
 REOPENING 2017
- 28. Rosedown State Historic Site (St. Francisville)



- Audubon State Historic Site/Oakley House (St. Francisville)
- 30. Centenary State Historic Site (Jackson)
- Longfellow-Evangeline State Historic Site (St. Martinville)
- 32. Fontainebleau State Park (Mandeville)
- 33. Fort Pike State Historic Site (New Orleans)
- 34. Eddie G. Robinson Museum (Grambling)
- 35. Frogmore Cotton Plantation & Gins (Frogmore)
- 36. Delta Music Museum (Ferriday)
- 37. Le Vieux Village Historical Park Museum (Opelousas)
- 38. West Baton Rouge Museum (Port Allen)
- 39. San Francisco Plantation (Garyville)
- 40. Our Lady of Grace Historic Sanctuary (Reserve)
- 41. Ebenezer Baptist Church (Bogalusa)



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CUPID STRIKES

It's been the year of romance for these entertainers. Join in the celebration









ONES TO WATCH

There was a collective gasp when NFL star Russell Wilson and singer Ciara stepped out together at a White House event in April. The gorgeous duo confirmed that they've been dating for nearly a year and that they are celibate. "We're getting to know each other and building a solid foundation," Ciara told Gayle King.

▲ AMOUR REIGNS

Vanessa L. Williams is having a fab year. Before returning to the Miss America pageant three decades after being the first Black woman to win, she married businessman Jim Skrip in Buffalo, New York, in July. ▷

BYE TO LIVING SINGLE

Actress and comedian Kim Coles met Reggie Mckiver when he was assigned as her security at an event. The connection was instant, and the couple's lavish summer nuptials were featured on *David Tutera's CELEBrations* on WEtv.





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MOVING ON

We send our best wishes to these uncoupling stars





STILL GOING STRONG

THE SMITHS SPEAK OUT ON SEPARATION RUMORS

Last summer, reigning Black love royalty Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith celebrated 17 years of togetherness. And whispers that their union was ending did not sit well with the couple. Smith wrote on his Facebook page: "Jada and I are...NOT GETTING A DIVORCE!!!!!!!!!!! :-) I promise you all - if I ever decide to divorce my Queen - I SWEAR I'll tell you myself!" She cosigned with a tweet minutes later: "My king has spoken." The PDA continued as Smith celebrated his wife's birthday online. "I have sung happy birthday to you 20 times and I have bought you 19 birthday presents (I was mad that one year). I have watched you blow out 693 candles (737 after tonite). I've told you 'I love you' at least 8,285 times. And of the nearly 3.96 billion women on the planet—there is only 1 that I want to spend the rest of my life with. Happy birthday, my love!" #swoon \Box



PORTRA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES



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HEALTHY & HAPPY · HOLIDAY FIT

hope to make healthy choices, decide that you will before you even get out of bed. "At the start of your day, take five minutes for deep breaths," suggests holistic practitioner Tracy Piper, coauthor of *The Piper Protocol: The Insider's Secret to Weight Loss & Internal Fitness* (William Morrow). Repeat affirmations of how powerful you are, or simply clear your mind so you can concentrate on your daily goals. Research indicates that meditation may help relieve stress (which can contribute to emotional eating) and control cravings. Piper recommends doing a repeat between 10 A.M. and noon: "That's when people are most active and engaged during the workweek, but taking a few minutes to breathe can de-stress you and refocus your intentions."

2. GET ONLINE. "Use social media to your benefit by joining a fitness challenge or finding a weight loss group that will motivate you to move," suggests celebrity fitness trainer Jeanette Jenkins, creator of thehollywoodtrainerclub.com. The more support you have, the easier it will be to say no to all the treats coworkers are bringing to the office. Also take some time to "like" and "follow" as many health-oriented pages on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as you can. Seeing smart food and fitness options appear in your feed as often as the pies your friends are baking will help you maintain instead of gain.

3. HAVE SOME SWEETS. Keep a handful of peppermint candies in your bag so you can pop one into your mouth when you're tempted to go for seconds—or firsts—of something you know is calorie overload. "Peppermint may help suppress your appetite, but more important, the candy creates a gap time to ask yourself if you really want that food," explains Susan Albers, Psy.D., author of 50 More Ways to Soothe Yourself Without Food: Mindfulness Strategies to Cope With Stress and End Emotional Eating (New Harbinger Publications). "By the time the mint has dissolved, it's likely the urge to eat will have passed."



4. PULL UP THE COVERS. You may want to shop online, wrap presents and cook into the wee hours, but get your rest so you don't pack on the pounds. Studies show that lack of sleep can lead to weight gain, while getting enough z's can help you slim down.

3. DROP AND GIVE IT TEN. Even if you don't have time for a 50-minute dance class, doing something is better than nothing. "It could be a ten-minute circuit, with push-ups, planks and more, or a four-minute total body workout—just get moving," says Jenkins. "These exercises will have some training effect on your body. And after a few minutes, you might be inclined to do more."

6. FILL YOUR GLASS—WITH WATER. "Not only does water rev up your metabolism, but it also fills you up. It can help stave off hunger and prevent overeating," explains celebrity nutritionist Rovenia Brock. "I recommend that my clients drink half their weight in water." So if you are 150 pounds, strive for 75 ounces a day. Sip a glass including a spritz of lemon first thing in the morning to boost your metabolism, take a swig in between nibbles at soirees and have a bottle handy at work.

7. FRATERNIZE AWAY FROM THE TABLE. "

Research shows that people tend to eat mindlessly and consume more calories when they socialize in close proximity to food," reveals Brock, creator of everythingro.com. When you hit your sister's house or the office party, be sure to position yourself away from the dessert spread and buffet to chat with friends, family and coworkers.

CALORIE CHECKPOINTS

THESE HOLIDAY HOT SPOTS ARE FILLED WITH TEMPTATION. HERE'S HOW TO EAT SMART ON THE GO

The Holiday Party

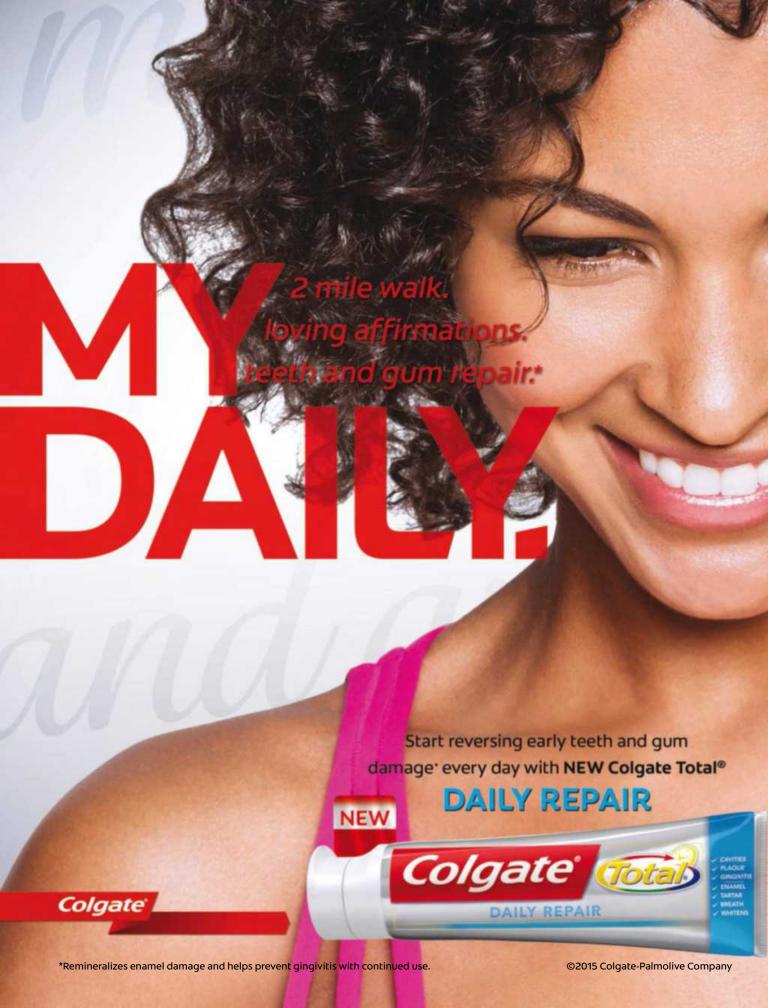
You've probably heard that you should have a small meal before you attend. But once you arrive, consider eating with your nondominant hand. According to one study, doing so can reduce how much you consume by 30 percent.

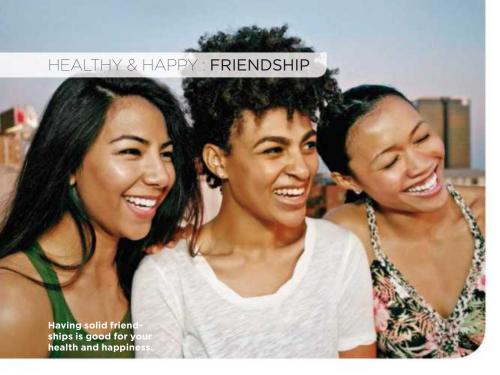
The Mall

Set your intention before heading inside, and avoid the food court if possible. If your sweet tooth is calling, choose a healthy smoothie over a decadent dessert.

Get-Togethers

Let honesty be the best policy. If you really want to have a bite of your best friend's mac and cheese, go for it. But make sure she knows you're watching your weight and could use her support in not going overboard. That's what friends are for, right?





BE SOMEBODY TO LEAN ON

A SUPPORTIVE SISTER CIRCLE IS ONE OF OUR BEST ASSETS. HERE'S HOW TO KEEP THE BONDS STRONG

BY LASHIEKA HUNTER

riends. How many of us have them? Our confidantes are often the people who motivate us, inspire us and give us pearls of wisdom when we're in need. They can be tension relievers and therefore beneficial to our health. "Black women tend to rely on social support more than men do. These friendships involve more self-disclosure and feelings of closeness," says Monica T. Campbell, Ph.D., a psychologist in Philadelphia. "Social support can serve as a buffer against the impact of the many stressors we experience."

Chicago native Aisha Madhi, 39, credits her squad of eight with being her rock. "Although I was fortunate to be born with three sisters, I am blessed to experience sisterhood through my female friendships that span more than 25 years," she says. "My circle of friends provides a safe place where I can let go and be my authentic self." According to the Mayo Clinic, not only does having a strong social support network reduce stress and boost happiness, but it can also increase your sense of belonging and improve your self-confidence.

In addition, the network can help you cope with traumas and encourage you to change or avoid unhealthy lifestyle habits, such as drinking excessively or getting little or no exercise.

Friendship is crucial to our longevity and our contentment. "Our family relationships tend to come with greater anxiety and responsibilities like scheduling appointments, managing money and dividing chores," shares Shasta Nelson, author and CEO of girlfriend circles.com. "Our friendships can give us healing." Girlfriend Circles, which provides women's friendship matching, pairs ladies in more than 65 cities in the U.S. and Canada.

Girlfriends can be the loves of our lives, and like all great relationships, yours will require effort to keep things on track. Here's how you can step up your friend game during one of the most nerve-racking times of the year.

Be available. The holidays are supposed to be a happy time, but that's not the reality for everyone. "They can be a reminder that things may not have gone our way throughout the year,"

says Campbell. "During the season, we're also confronted with family relationships that may not be as healthy as we'd like. And if we're survivors of abuse, we may have to be around a relative who has harmed us." This could be the period when our friends need us the most. Check in with anyone who has had a rough year, and be accessible if she wants to ditch the Christmas Eve dinner at her aunt's house and hang out with you, or if she needs some words of encouragement while on her way to a family get-together.

Be understanding. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, one woman in eight will struggle with major depression in her lifetime. So you may have a friend or two who are dealing with a mental health crisis during the season and are not up to coming to your annual New Year's Eve bash. Don't be offended. Be empathetic. "One way to be a better friend is to ask your pal how she would like to be supported. Sometimes a person might want another type of support that we're not offering," explains Campbell.

Be forgiving. We've all had a falling-out with an acquaintance. The key is to be able to move forward if an argument or a problem occurs in the relationship. Just like marriages, friendships need commitment, forgiveness, communication and nurturing to keep them healthy over time. "Friendships can be challenging, but it is important that we hang in there and put as much attention on the association as we do other relationships," says Campbell. "Those friends can be lifelong partners on our journey in the same way that family or romantic partners can be."

Be creative. Just like you have holiday traditions with your loved ones, create a ritual with your girlfriends. If you usually spend Christmas Day with family, suggest Christmas Eve brunch or a New Year's Day potluck with your girls. The goal is to establish customs that keep you connected and engaged with your besties.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: CHUCK OLU-ALABI (2); COURTESY OF AGATE PUBLISHING

TAKE UPTHE CAKE TORCH

READY TO LEARN BIG MAMA'S KITCHEN SECRETS? GET INSPIRED BY BAKER-BLOGGER JOCELYN DELK ADAMS BY LOLA ADESINA

rowing up in Chicago, Jocelyn Delk Adams would take road trips to Mississippi with her family to visit her grandmother Maggie Small, affectionately known as Big Mama. "She would always want to bake or show me something in the kitchen," says Adams, 34. "Her cakes are the love notes of my family." Adams shares many of Big Mama's recipes with a modern twist in her new cookbook, *Grandbaby* Cakes: Modern Recipes, Vintage Charm, Soulfood Memories (Agate Surrey).

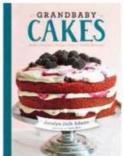
At 8, Adams made her first scrumptious creation: a 7UP Pound Cake that had a crunchy crust and subtle hints of the citrusy soda. The cake is now a family treasure. Yet as she matured, she says baking started to seem old-fashioned. "I was opposed to set gender rules that women were supposed to be in the kitchen," says Adams. But after earning a film degree and working as a producer and an event planner, she found herself

drawn back there in her late twenties. "I walked into my kitchen one day and pulled out ingredients for a pound cake. I decided to stop fighting the urge and baked every weekend since," she recalls. "You can be the woman who bakes and brings home the bacon too."

In 2012, with a renewed interest in baking and the recollection of her early days with her beloved grandmother, Adams launched grandbaby-cakes.com. A mix of her media and kitchen skills, the site quickly took off and now draws thousands of visitors every month. Her Real-Deal Caramel Cake has been pinned more than 150,000 times on Pinterest. "That cake put me on the map," says Adams. "I'm a big-city hipster with a fastpaced career, but I am my most inspired in the kitchen." The avid baker gets new ideas constantly. Her favorite cocktail sparked her Mississippi Mudslide Cake recipe. "I love this drink and thought it would make a cool cake."

Christmas for the Delk family is a huge affair, as members gather in Chicago for dinner. "We always have the holiday







You can be the woman who bakes and brings home the bacon too.

classics, but I also love experimenting. So each year I bring something new," Adams says. She has yet to top her Christmas masterpiece: Red Velvet S'more Cake. The upgraded delectable, which features a graham cracker crust and marshmallows, is an all-time favorite of Adams's husband of four years.

This festive season, treat yourself to a homemade sweet and learn your own family recipes. "A great way to take the edge off baking is to get in the kitchen with someone else," Adams says. "This makes it a fun project and a much more enjoyable way to create memories." Be sure to go through the recipe before beginning, then get to baking. "There's something relaxing knowing that if you follow a recipe, you'll most likely get what you want." The next time life gives you lemons, make Adams's Lemon Pound Cake.

To get the recipe for Adams's Red Velvet S'more Cake, visit ESSENCE.com/redvelvetsmore.□



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COVER

Cushnie et Ochs top, \$750, and skirt, \$995, Neiman Marcus. **Cristina Ortiz** ear cuff* and rings*, Alchemist, Miami Beach, Florida, 305-531-4653.

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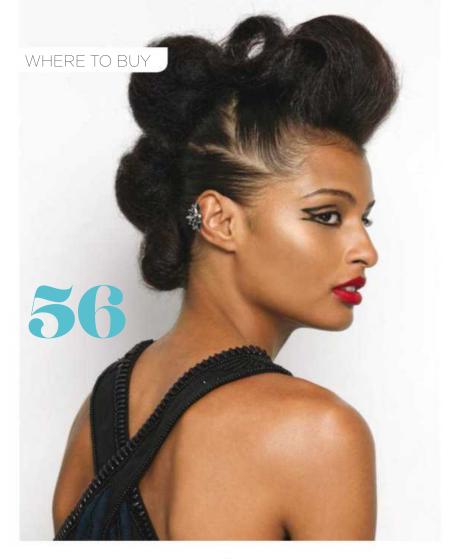




SHONDALAND

ESSENCE® teamed up with Entertainment Weekly, and People to celebrate ABC's TGIT Line-up presented by Toyota at Gracias Madre in West Hollywood.

Top to bottom: ESSENCE® and Entertainment Weekly magazine covers on display at celebration, (L-R) Actors Aja Naomi King, Jeff Perry, and George Newbern take a selfie, (L-R) Jesse Williams and Jerrika Hinton pose in the Twitter Booth



Armani Collezioni pants (as part of suit), \$1,995, Bloomingdale's.

Page 85: Halston Heritage gown, \$695, halston.com. Cristina Ortiz ring*, Alchemist, Miami Beach, Florida, 305-531-4815.

PARTY GIRL

Page 87: Naeem Khan jacket*, by special order, Bergdorf Goodman, New York City, 800-558-1855. Naeem Khan leggings*, by special order, naeemkhan.com for info. Carole Shashona earrings* and ring*, Barneys New York. Melinda Maria ring, \$98, melindamaria.com for info. Ted Baker clutch, \$185, tedbaker.com. Stuart Weitzman heels, \$598, Stuart Weitzman, NYC, 212-750-2555.

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Page 90: Jill Stuart dress, \$878, jillstuart.com. Neely Phelan earrings, \$68, neelyphelan.com. Melinda Maria ring, \$98, melindamaria.com. Reiss crystal ring, \$120, reiss.com. Gianvito Rossi boots*, Gianvito Rossi. All other items, stylist's own.

Page 91: Sass & Bide dress, \$2,900, sassandbide.com. Jennifer Behr headband, \$262, jenniferbehr .com. Reiss crystal ring, \$120, reiss.com. Melinda Maria ring, \$98, melindamaria.com. Gianvito Rossi booties, \$1,195, Gianvito Rossi. All other items, stylist's own. On table: Furla bag, \$348, furla.com. Manolo Blahnik heels, \$1,030, saksfifthavenue.com. Clutch, stylist's own. □

*price upon request



ESSENCE® kicked off New York Fashion Week in style with the 2nd Annual *ESSENCE® Street Style Block Party and Awards* in DUMBO, Brooklyn. The event brought together over 6,000 of the flyest and fiercest consumers as well as bloggers, designers, stylists, local fashion vendors and food trucks, to celebrate real women with style; making it one of the largest block party of its kind!



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Rising designers Charlene
Dunbar and Ashley Ryles
showcased their capsule
collections inspired by the
Chevy Cruze vehicle in the
Chevrolet Chic Lounge. Veteran
Designer Ron Bass mentored
these rising designers and
was on site to meet and
greet with fans in front of
the Chevy Cruze vechicle.





Home Depot put a spotlight on their hottest décor and home styling tips with the Home Depot Closet Central. The chic closet was decked out with Home Depot products, and styling trends and tricks were provided by AphroChic. #HomeDepotClosetChic





The Block Party was followed by a star-studded VIP awards dinner, Fashion industry veterans, celebrities and social media influencers came together as we honored Designer to Watch Charles Elliott Harbison, Curator of Cool Ciara, Style Disruptor Jason Rembert, and Street Style Crush Karen Blanchard.











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Sagittarius November 22 to December 21

W You're a free spirit and don't take yourself too seriously. Highly intelligent and big on education, you are the seeker of truth and honestly feel that you're being helpful. An eternal optimist, you have the good sense to surround yourself with folks who can help you realize your many dreams. Anyone looking for a Sagittarian should scout technology, science or medical events. In general, you're compatible with Aquarius, Libra, Leo and Aries. With Gemini, your opposite, the hookups sizzle, but what lies beneath the magnetic attraction is a two-headed monster you won't conquer. THE YEAR AHEAD Traveling spawns a curiosity and drive that are so characteristic of the unstoppable you. However, don't get bogged down in the expense. THIS MONTH LOVE: If the timing is off, your much-anticipated date can move to next year. WORK: A part-time gig could offset unwanted holiday bills. MONEY: Unless there's a plan, lending and spending are not options. INSPIRATION: Your judgment of others dims your light and reflects negatively on you.

Capricorn

December 22 to January 19

LOVE: Forget keeping your new beau a secret. The holidays are a great time for introductions. WORK: Take a break and reassess your career path. MONEY: Compromise on joint assets, but hold the line on risky investments. INSPIRA-TION: Your discernment rules out the fake people when real issues arise.

January 20 to February 18

LOVE: If you're open to romance, your busy calendar is a go. WORK: Consider a partnership if your solo gig goes south. MONEY: Make sure vour outlook on charitable efforts is clear and concise. INSPIRATION: Your supercharged imagination leaves those who try to compete in the dust.

Pisces

February 19 to March 20

LOVE: The merriment of the season masks the abundance of frogs over princes, so be careful. Couples, the grass isn't greener. WORK: You can succeed without damaging your integrity. MONEY: Holiday overload has you in spend-now-and-pay-later mode. Reality check, please. INSPIRATION: Be bold. You can be soft-spoken yet firm.

Aries

March 21 to April 19

LOVE: Revisiting a tryst makes you vulnerable. Couples, stay the course. WORK: Events at a holiday party need not cross the line. Have fun, but be professional. MONEY: Impulsiveness with finances must be kept in check. INSPIRATION: Inside your heart, flights of fancy are determined to peek through like a flower on a dirt road.

Taurus

April 20 to May 20

LOVE: When it comes to mistletoe action, it's your call. WORK: The season's spirit spills over to mending fences with colleagues. MONEY: If "mo' money" is your mantra, then no money—lending, that is—should be the rule. INSPIRATION: Your fear of change doesn't equate to a lack of stability.

Gemini

May 21 to June 20

LOVE: Keep your options open at a soiree. Couples, holiday fun is doable. WORK: Inattention to detail is due to boredom and restlessness. MONEY: A settlement is delayed when you lose focus and miss the deadlines. INSPIRATION: Your innate ability to amuse, enlighten and entertain simultaneously says a lot.

Cancer

June 21 to July 22

LOVE: Precious memories and fun with your partner maintain the relationship. WORK: Your efforts pay off, so embrace the praise and the promotion, too. MONEY: To expedite the process, you need to spearhead legal matters. INSPIRATION: A new day is your new opportunity to succeed.

Leo

July 23 to August 22

LOVE: Compromises begin with you both. When the blame game starts, you lose. WORK: Emotional outbursts need a filter. Hurt feelings take a while to get over. MONEY: Your generosity should not be a curse for you and a blessing to others. Develop a plan. INSPIRATION: Take a time-out, follow your heart and discover your true bliss.

Virgo

August 23 to September 22

LOVE: The naughty type may intrigue you, but find a sensible substitute instead. Couples, openness is essential. WORK: Avoid confrontations. Bosses are watching. MONEY: Uncertainty about finances unsettles you. Hire a pro. INSPIRATION: Face your fears head-on as though you cannot fail.

Libra

September 23 to October 22

LOVE: Communication can strengthen your bond. WORK: Actions speak louder than words. Avoid the haters. MONEY: Secondhand stores and dress rental companies can counteract holiday spending. INSPIRATION: Material worth does not validate selfworth. You are enough.

Scorpio

October 23 to November 21

LOVE: Mending fences and quashing drama jump-start happy feelings and holiday cheer. WORK: Productivity takes priority over ritual and tradition. MONEY: Sentiment should not trump commonsense spending. INSPIRATION: Take advantage of the moment when your gift from the universe reveals itself.

Horoscope by **Thelma Balfour**, author of *Black Love Signs* and *Black Sun Signs* (Touchstone).

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A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND COURAGE

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Dear God,

Here we are. Grateful to be aware of your presence and rejoice in it. It is only by your power that we rise to claim our eternal inheritance. EVEN WHEN OUR FAITH BECOMES A FLICKERING CANDLE in an undetermined night, you fix our collective gaze toward what we know to be right, just and fair. Here we are, God, answering your call to be game **changers**, utilizing divinely given complex creative gifts. You have asked us to be **BOLD** in face of the **senseless** sufferings of our time. Here we are, God, THANKING YOU for the backbone to **STAND UP** against the naysayers; the tools to do the impossible before breakfast; the chutzpah to refuse to step aside and let others do it; THE COURAGE TO BE WHO YOU MEANT US TO BE and the consistent inspiration to dream, provide, advise, explore, confess, organize, support, dance, laugh, love and love again as we seek new ventures.





Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie (@vashtimckenzie) is the first woman elected as bishop for the African Methodist Episcopal Church. For more information on her ministry, log on to thisisyourwakeupcallonline.com.





